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TAMPERE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

TIIA TIRKKONEN

LEAD QUALIFICATION MANAGEMENT IN A CRM SYSTEM

Master of Science Thesis

Examiner: prof. Hannu Kärkkäinen
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ABSTRACT

TIIA TIRKKONEN: Lead Qualification Management in a CRM System
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The purpose of this thesis work was to define guidelines based on which lead management could be best supported. The focus of the scope was on how sales should manage the leads once they have been entered into the system, for example, through an online inquiry form. The customer organization was Metso Corporation, a global company specializing in solutions to support modernizing infrastructure.

To reach the objectives, both theoretical and empirical research was conducted. Theoretical research was a literature review related to sales lead management and information elements tied to sales leads. While focus was on the handling of leads, the full lead management process from lead generation to customer relationship management was considered where applicable. Knowledge related to leads were investigated, as well as transaction and activity information that could be tied to leads. Empirical research was conducted through interviews with sales and marketing management and participant observation. Experiences and requirements related to lead management were the main topics of discussion. Analysis of interviews and observation was conducted inductively and results grouped on the high level by research question themes.

By identifying themes and combining the findings with those in existing literature, research questions were answered. The requirements and roles involved in lead management were solved, as well as what kinds of information is tied to leads and how their quality could be evaluated and improved. It was found that to best support sales' lead management work at Metso, the CRM system should be configured to support collaboration between different stakeholders. Collaboration was seen as an important part of being able to manage leads through information.

While collaboration is already something done between sales, marketing and other stakeholders in lead management, the information systems currently in use do not fully support the whole process. For better end-to-end process visibility, the existing web lead management system should be migrated onto the same platform as other CRM activities. This allows for connecting sales to lead sources. The CRM system's usability should also be developed to support collaboration. Collaboration involves a lot of knowledge that is tied to individuals. Utilizing this tacit knowledge in qualifying leads can help systemize the process and give better standardized information about leads to both management and the sales representatives managing them.

TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tämän diplomityön tarkoitus on määritellä suosituksia, joiden perusteella myyntileadejä voisi parhaiten kvalifioida ja hallita. Työ on rajattu käsittelemään myynnin osuutta leadienhallintatyöstä eli käytännössä kuinka leadejä tulisi käsitellä, kun ne on syötetty järjestelmään esimerkiksi verkossa olevan tiedustelulomakkeen kautta. Asiakasyritys työssä on Metso Oyj, joka on erikoistunut infrastruktuuria nykyaikaistaviin ratkaisuihin.

Tutkimus suoritettiin teoreettisesti ja empiirisesti. Teoreettinen tutkimus oli kirjallisuuskatsaus liittyen myyntileadien hallintaan sekä leadeihin liittyviin informaatioelementteihin. Vaikka työ oli rajattu leadien käsittelyvaiheeseen, koko leadienhallintaprosessi on huomioitu tarpeen mukaan. Työssä tutkittiin leadeihin liittyvää tietoa sekä aktiviteettitietoja, jotka voitiin sitoa leadeihin. Empiirinen tutkimus sisälsi haastatteluja myynnin ja markkinoinnin johdon kanssa sekä havainnointia. Aiheina olivat heidän osaamisensa ja tarpeensa leadienhallintaan liittyen. Tutkimuksen analyysi tehtiin induktiivisesti ja tulokset ryhmiteltiin tutkimuskysymysten teemojen mukaan.

Tutkimuskysymyksiin saatiin vastattua tunnistamalla teemoja ja yhdistämällä ne löydöksiin kirjallisuudesta. Työssä selvitettiin vaatimuksia ja rooleja liittyen leadienhallintaan. Lisäksi tutkittiin millaista tietoa leadeihin on sidottu ja miten niiden laatua voisi arvioida ja kehittää. Tuloksena voitiin todeta, että myynnin leadienhallintatyötä Metsolla voitaisiin parhaiten tukea konfiguroimalla asiakkuudenhallintajärjestelmä (CRM) tukemaan eri osapuolien välistä vuorovaikutusta. Vuorovaikutus nähtiin tärkeänä osana kyvykkyyttä hallita leadejä tiedon avulla.

Vuorovaikutusta tapahtuu jo myynnin, markkinoinnin ja muiden osapuolien välillä, mutta nykyiset tietojärjestelmät eivät täysin tue koko prosessia. Nykyinen leadienhallintajärjestelmä tulisi siirtää samalle alustalle muiden asiakkuudenhallintaan liittyvien aktiviteettien kanssa, jotta saavutettaisiinparempi näkyvyys kaikkiin myyntiprosessin vaiheisiin. Järjestelmän käytettävyyttä tulisi myös kehittää tukemaan vuorovaikutusta ja yhteistyöskentelyä. Vuorovaikutukseen liittyy paljon tietoa, joka on sidottu yksilöihin. Tämän hiljaisen tiedon hyödyntämistä leadien kvalifioinnissa voi auttaa prosessin systematisoinnissa ja antaa paremmin standardoitua tietoa leadeistä sekä johdolle että niitä hallinnoiville myyjille.

PREFACE

This Master of Science thesis was completed for Metso Corporation while working in the Global Applications team of Metso Business Information Technology Services, under Metso Shared Services. The research was done in close collaboration with the Customer and Marketing Operations team responsible for sales lead generation and lead management processes and systems.

I would like to thank Esko Harjama and Sami Olejniczak from Metso for their guidance and support throughout the research. With their help, the topic and scope of the thesis was defined in a way that it would support other initiatives and future development targets in the organization. They have also provided ideas, input and materials throughout the process, as well as helped find and contact interview participants. Interview participants also significantly contributed to this research, and I would therefore like to thank them again for their participation as well.

Professor Hannu Kärkkäinen from Tampere University of Technology has also provided guidance for the thesis, sparring me to develop the ideas and findings in the thesis to be able to provide the best possible results. For this, I would like to thank him for the advice and help throughout the process.

The rest of you, you're great as well.

Tampere, 17.9.2015

Tiia Tirkkonen

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the research

Data. A word heard almost daily in this age, partly due to the amounts and ways in which it is being produced and stored for use. (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 51; Ramakrishnan et al. 2006, pp. 1-2; Linoff & Berry 2011, pp. 12-13) Data, by definition, is often linked to computers and programming, where it acts as a piece or pieces to work with (World Encyclopedia 2004; Law 2009; Chandler & Munday 2011). Sources also cite that data in itself is meaningless without association to other information, and the removal of that other information is what allows data to be compressed into a form that can easily be read by computer programs (Daintith & Wright 2008; Chandler & Munday 2011). Patterns in data can also create information, but it is crucial to recognize which information is actually useful and when data is being collected at the correct level of detail (Linoff & Berry 2011, pp. 47-49).

Marketing functions aim to actively produce data about potential customers through different channels, such as trade shows and company web sites, for sales representatives to follow up on (Collins 1985, p. 77; SiriusDecisions Inc. 2006, according to Sabnis et al. 2013, p. 52). The data can be entered into databases and applications where sales managers can dynamically track and manage cases all the way to after-sales. The quality of the prospect data can also be tracked in these systems. (Collins 1985, p. 77) According to Collins (1985), these types of systems in general improve sales representatives' productivity and ability to manage leads. It is, however, important that the systems can be utilized to provide relevant and correct information about the customer's requirements and potential in addition to basic data, such as addresses and contact details. If information is not valid, a customer with potential may be categorized incorrectly and therefore overlooked. (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 8)

When potential customers enter their information into a web inquiry form, it can be seen as a sales lead. Sales leads can also be identified through a number of other sources, such as customer visits, trade shows and company events. (E.g. Erschik 1989; Monat 2011; Salesforce 2015a) In general, if interest towards a certain group of products or services can be identified, it can be considered a lead. Different definitions and levels of sales leads are explored further in chapter 2. The terms sales lead and lead are used most synonymously in this thesis.

As sales' workload is constantly high, it is important to efficiently recognize which leads are the ones that should be nurtured (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 34; Dannenberg & Zupancic

2010; Monat 2011, p. 192). If not managed wisely, more than half of a sales representative's prospecting time could be spent unproductively or on sorting an abundance of generated leads that have not been qualified before being sent onward (Erschik 1989, p. 28; Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 59). Otherwise, the selling company is at risk of providing a mass of customers with equally poor service, instead of providing excellent service to the few customers with the most buying potential (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 7). Finding the right customers to sell to already at an early stage in the sales process has been proven to generate profit (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 65; Hutt & Speh 2013, p. 222). This often requires doing qualification work on the inquiry before it is forwarded to sales (Erschik 1989, p. 29). Additionally, sales and marketing should be in alignment of what a qualified lead is like that can be delegated onward to sales representatives for further actions (DemandGen Report 2014, p. 7).

In the fall of 2014, Salesforce sent out a survey to marketers globally and received more than 5000 responses about the state of digital marketing in companies. In business-to-business (B2B) marketing, the quality of leads was seen as one of the top three challenges that business is facing globally, with customer acquisition following closely behind. (Salesforce 2015b) In a study by DemandGen Report (2014), only a third of marketers surveyed were scoring and qualifying their leads, meaning that most leads were being forwarded to sales directly. As the number of leads being entered into systems increases along with sales' overall workload, lead prioritization may not be getting enough attention. By excluding unqualified leads from entering the lead management process, productivity and conversion rates of leads to actual sales opportunities should increase (Eloqua 2015).

While software is not the solution to lead management, processes can be supported by systems when trained and used strategically (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 205; Dannenberg & Zupancic 2009, pp. 17-18; Hutt & Speh 2013, p. 73). Lead generation can be expensive, and not utilizing means to take full advantage of them will result in a waste of resources (Erschik 1989; Jackson 2009). This thesis focuses on how and what information about the lead reaches sales, and what they can effectively do about it with the help of both systems and processes. According to Erschik (1989, p. 28), this has tended to be a topic that has been neglected. While systems exist and leads are generated through marketing efforts, how they are qualified and handled may not be given enough attention.

The customer organization for this thesis is Metso Corporation, a global B2B company, which is in many ways in a transition phase at the time the thesis is being done. There are major changes ongoing in the company's infrastructure, including the divestment of the Process Automation Solutions business line to Valmet as well as reorganization of many functions to better support business. At the same, many information technology systems are being renewed and development is fast-paced. Strategic changes have also provoked other initiatives, especially in the sales organization.

In the customer organization, there is an ongoing initiative to develop sales throughout all business areas to be more proactive instead of reactive, and overall for business to become more customer centric. According to Ross & Tyler (2012, p. 4), this development is not an easy one, and often requires new systems and ways of working. Having support for the initiative all the way from corporate strategy gives better chances of succeeding (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2009, p. 22). Then main focus of the program so far has been to develop and implement a unified process for sales organizations and customer relationship management (CRM) system where they can track sales cases, forecast sales and collaborate on their work globally.

Lead management has not yet been tackled within the program, but lead management is supported by functionality in the new cloud-based CRM system, Salesforce, and will therefore eventually be migrated there from the legacy platform. Salesforce is considered a leading provider of CRM solutions (e.g. Hutt & Speh 2013, p. 205; Desisto 2014). It is considered important that any tools are included in overall concept planning, to avoid having disconnected systems that are not able to fully support the business functions that it should (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 22). The same applies here – as sales is moving towards using one system for other aspects of customer relationship management, it seems only natural that lead management would be included as well. When using one system, combining data for reporting visibility should also become easier.

In addition to the ongoing CRM program, the customer organization has recently released a renewed version of their public web pages and development of them is ongoing. The new pages have been designed to better support the generation of sales leads through different ways of gathering contact information and interests. One of the main ideas has been that the threshold for becoming a lead is quite low. For example, a website visitor can download a product brochure and leave their contact information, which can be seen as a lead. Once the given information is qualified and possibly enriched with other known information about the contact, the sales organization can be in touch with the potential customer. In the best case, the contact can lead to first one sales case and eventually a loyal, profitable customer.

1.2 Objectives and research questions

The main goal of this thesis is to propose guidelines for how sales leads should be qualified so that the work that sales does related to lead management can be best supported. The improved capability to manage these leads should be achieved using analytics, better exploiting available data and information in lead qualification. Eventually the solution of this thesis should be a way for sales to use the new CRM system in their lead management work, as well as offer better visibility for marketing and management on how lead management has succeeded. A lead management system can be considered successful if it facilitates the work of sales in an intuitive and effective way, providing sales with qualified leads that can consistently be pursued as opportunities (Collins 1985, p. 77).

The objectives of the research can be phrased into the following main research question:

- How can the lead management process be best supported at Metso?

The main research question will be answered by investigating several sub-questions that are in line with the objectives of this study:

- What are the requirements for successfully managing leads?
- What kinds of roles and responsibilities do people and information systems have in the lead management process?
- What kinds of data and information are tied to leads?
- How can the quality of leads and lead information be evaluated and improved?
- What is the role of analytics in lead qualification?

While the role of analytics was considered an interesting possibility in lead management, it was eventually recognized not to be a central theme at this point. Analytics is a broad topic that can include many different methods and tools. In this thesis, discussion concentrated on ways reporting could be used to help analyze and display information as well as automating lead management functionalities.

The focus of this thesis is on the end of the lead management process – concentrating more on how the leads will be qualified and reach sales representatives instead of how the leads are actually generated in the first place. Figure 1 depicts how scope has been limited. While this is a rough depiction including only the roles of marketing and sales, they were seen as the main roles at the time of defining the topic.

Figure 1. *Research scope.*

For the purpose of this research, most leads discussed will enter the process through the company's website. Ross & Tyler (2012, p. 64, 112) refer to these as "inbound leads". The format of the leads as they come in is fairly standardized and there is a process in place for how work is continued once they have been entered. However, sales currently has to use separate systems for handling the lead and managing it as an opportunity. The target is to have all functionality in one system.

Through better ability to assign qualified leads effectively and identify potentially "hot" leads, sales efficiency should ultimately improve. To reach this goal, members of the sales

organization are interviewed to identify their requirements related to information in qualified sales leads. Based on the action research approach chosen for this thesis, development should be done in close cooperation with the affected organization members in general. Guidance for the research will be provided by members of the Global Customer and Marketing Operations (CMO) team as well as CRM concept development.

The purpose of the research is to be exploratory: to find a hypothetic solution and new viewpoints on a topic based on findings (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 134; Saunders et al. 2009, pp. 139-140). Any quantitative findings on the current situation will mostly be based on the legacy "web lead management" tool and qualitative findings on interviews and observation conducted with members of the sales organization.

1.3 Research methodology

In this section, the selected research philosophy and methodology are briefly outlined. The actual methods and how they have been used are described in more detail in chapter 4, Research Methods and Material.

The chosen research philosophy for this study is interpretivism. Definite laws do not often apply to studies done in the field of business and management, making it difficult to generalize research findings to suit them directly. This study concentrates on and aims to affect humans and their interactions; therefore it is crucial that the researcher is able to understand the different data collected as individual pieces, instead of just aiming to fit them into a particular law. (Saunders et al. 2009, pp. 115-116, 119)

Analysis of research results will be conducted inductively. Inductive analysis allows the researcher to relate their data better to the context being studied, construct theories that suit this context and then compare their own theories to those described in literature (Saunders et. al 2009, p. 61). Previous research related to the topic supports the validity of the findings and acts as verification for its reliability (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 19).

Several different empirical research methods are used to gather information on the topic from various viewpoints (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 126). One of the objectives of this thesis work is to define lead qualification management guidelines that specifically meets the needs of the target organization, instead of a generalized scheme. Inductive analysis supports this objective, in addition to being usually more suitable for analyzing data that is of qualitative nature, such as in this thesis (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 127).

The research strategy undertaken in this thesis is action research. The research focus will not be on describing the current situation at the customer organization; instead it will aim to iteratively involve people from the organization in the development of the process which they will be affected by. Employee involvement throughout the research process is a prerequisite for facilitating the possible change effects this thesis could have. (Wand & Wang 1996, p. 88; Saunders et al. 2009, pp. 147-148) This is considered especially

important in a busy sales organization, where many effects of this thesis could be felt. Pressure from within the organization and, on the other hand, the ability to contribute strengthens employees' motivation to participate in a change implementation (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 148).

Theoretical research in this thesis will be conducted as a literature review. The goal of the literature review is to determine how the research questions have already been answered by other researchers. This includes critically evaluating which sources are the most reliable and relevant for this specific thesis. A requirement for the reference material is objectivity, and the materials should also be analyzed objectively. (Saunders et al. 2009, pp. 65-66) Critical examination of materials and attitudes towards them are required to ensure subjectivity and informal thinking does not leave any gaps in knowledge that would lead to faulty conclusions (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 19).

Secondary literature sources, including academic journals and books, will primarily be used (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 181; Saunders et al. 2009, p. 69). Due to the current nature of the topic, also basic internet search engines will be used to expand viewpoints and help include the most recent texts as material, even though they may not always be considered scientific research. These types of materials provide guidance and descriptions of how other companies have implemented lead management practices similarly to how empirical benchmarking would do. Some of the materials used are even marketing material or blogs, created usually by marketing automation companies and professionals, and therefore the statements related to these materials should be seen as best practices and views of these consultants.

The additional material will help fill the gap that a scarce amount of scientific literature directly related to lead qualification has left (e.g. Monat 2011, pp. 179-180) in addition to offering the most up-to-date methods that are in use around intelligent lead management. Professional and scientific publications will be favored and the university library's materials and databases used. Key words for searches include "sales lead", "sales management, "sales inquiry", "sales lead data" and "lead management", as well as many other similar terms and combinations of them.

Empirical research will be conducted using several methods. Interviews and observation will be used to find internal requirements for the solution as well as draw possible ideas from the organization. These methods and their use in this research are described in more detail in chapter 4. What is common about these methods is that they all produce qualitative data. Qualitative data is often not directly presented in a standard format, as it is based on words instead of numbers that can be quantified and presented as statistics (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 482). The use of multiple qualitative methods in empirical research and analyzing their results with qualitative procedures is known as a multi-method qualitative study or triangulation of methods. Using multiple methods gives the opportunity to critically evaluate and combine data collected from different sources, as well as ensuring the

used method is best suited for the type of data to be collected at different phases of the research. (Saunders et al. 2009, pp. 152-153)

Both theoretical and empirical research methods have been chosen to be consistent with methodological objectivity. This means that results will be presented from all viewpoints, and especially that viewpoints contradicting with those of the researcher will not be excluded. Also, based on the description in chapter 4 of how research was conducted, other researchers should be able to repeat the research and attain approximately the same results. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, pp. 292-293) In any case, however, it is important to realize that even the slightest and most natural changes in circumstances can have an effect on results (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 328).

Since the research for this thesis is conducted in a relatively short timeframe of a few months, the time horizon for the study is considered cross-sectional (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 155). The current situation and requirements are researched and analyzed, and conclusions drawn based on findings during that time. 0 depicts a summary of the research methodology to be used in this thesis. The representation is adapted from Saunders' et al. (2009, p. 108) research 'onion'.

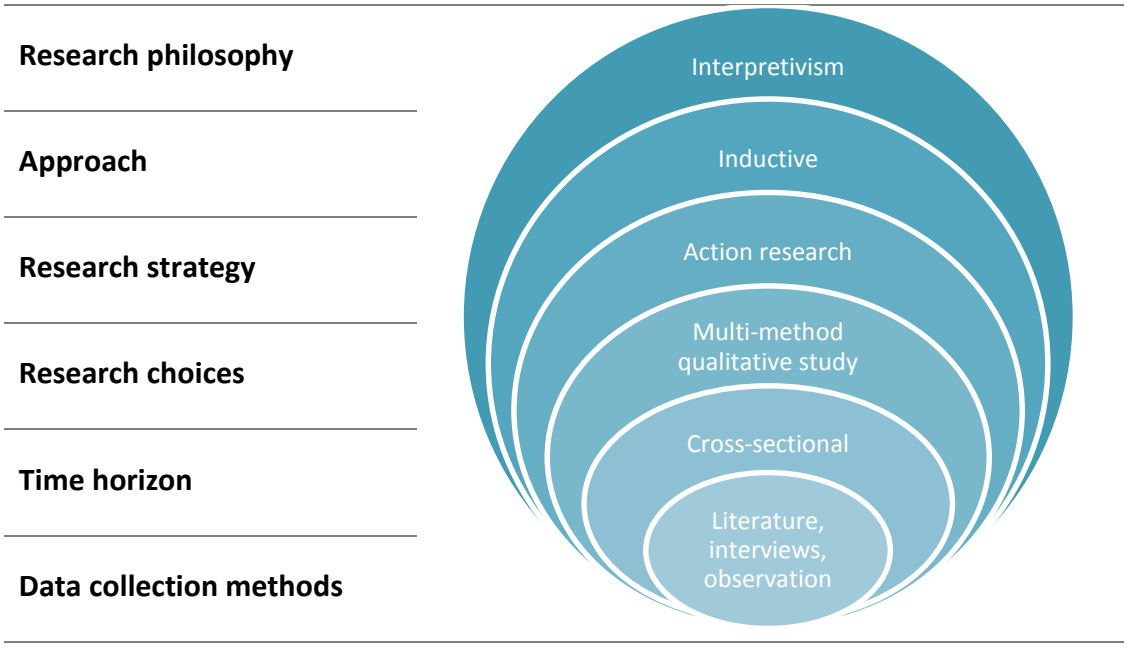


Figure 2. *Research methodology described with the research 'onion'.*

The outer layers of the 'onion' act as a base for choices in methodology used in the inner layers. They act as a guide for the viewpoints taken in the research as well as for selected research methods – generally, the whole thesis should be in line with the chosen philosophy. (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 106) The methodology, on the other hand, dictates how reliable and valid the research can be considered. The researcher has to always carefully consider all possible errors and biases, related to both the subject and the researcher.

Causal relationships are also not to be confused with other, unrelated events, which may have an effect on the results. (Saunders et al. 2009, pp. 156-157)

1.4 Structure

The structure and outline of the thesis will be as follows in Figure 3. Chapters 2 and 3 concentrate on existing literature and theory that aim to find how the research questions have been answered earlier. Theoretical findings will help support results and the drawing of conclusions from empirical findings. Chapter 2, Sales lead management, concentrates on the processes and roles tied to sales leads and the management of their qualification. Chapter 3, Information in leads, concentrates on data and information elements that can be found tied to sales leads as well as their classification and quality. Lead management with the support of intelligence and analytics is also briefly explored.

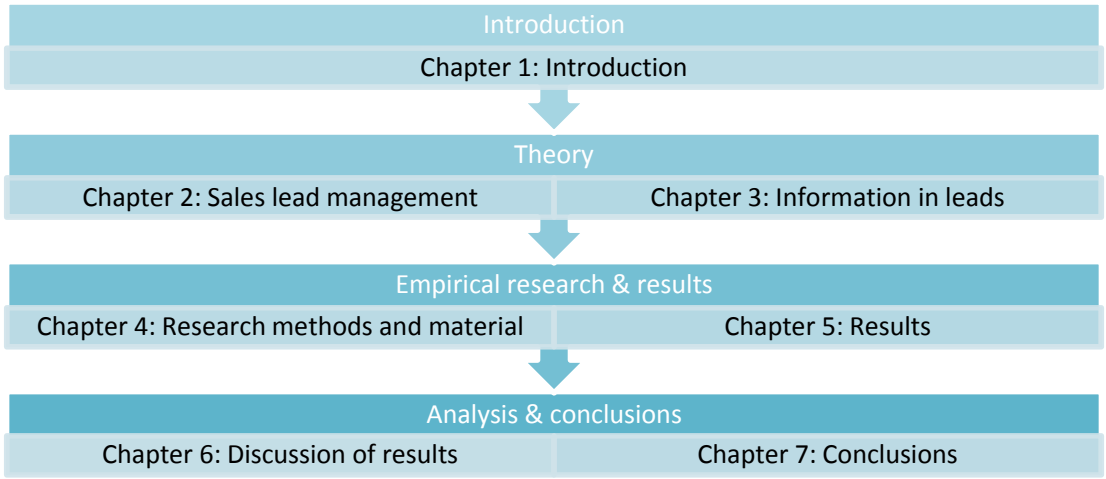


Figure 3. *Thesis structure.*

Methods for empirical research are introduced in further detail in chapter 4, Research methods and material, along with the methods used to guide analysis of the interview and observation findings. In chapter 5, Results, findings from empirical research are presented. In chapter 6, empirical findings are compared to theoretical findings from chapters 2 and 3. Being able to find support for empirical results from existing literature helps confirm the validity and success of the research.

Finally, in chapter 7, conclusions are drawn and answers to research questions summarized. How successful the research has been is also briefly discussed, as well as possible further research topics. Chapter 7 includes recommendations for future courses of action related to lead management and especially its integration into the new CRM system.

2. SALES LEAD MANAGEMENT

This chapter aims to answer the following research sub-questions:

- What are the requirements for successfully managing leads?
- What kinds of roles and responsibilities do people and information systems have in the lead management process?

Successful lead management is investigated through understanding what a sales lead is, what its lifecycle is like and what are the steps and processes related to its qualification. Lead generation and basic concepts in sales management are explored as a part of lead management. To solve what roles people and information systems have in the lead management process, the responsibilities of different roles in sales and marketing organizations are investigated, as well as what the significance of the used information systems are. In this case, the CRM system is the main focus, but it was also the information system that most typically came up when researching different system roles.

2.1 What is a lead?

To understand lead management, first it must be understood what is meant with a lead in this thesis, and what other terms are closely linked to it. Since Salesforce is the system now used at Metso for customer relationship management, terminology used by business as well as the IT support organization has developed to closely match standard Salesforce terminology. At Salesforce, a lead can be defined in a few ways (Salesforce 2015a):

- A person or people who show interest in a company's product or service.
- A prospect customer or potential opportunity.
- Any source of a potential deal, such as a website visitor who has asked for more information or someone who has responded to a campaign.

Though generally leads sound like new customers, it is important to realize leads may also come from existing customers (e.g. Monat 2011, p. 178). For example, while a service engineer is working at a customer site, they may notice a need to soon replace parts with new ones. They can inform their internal sales engineers of the opportunity even before the customer contacts different suppliers for quotations. The value of both potential and existing customers should contribute to the sales pipeline (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 100).

Other sources also define a sales lead similarly to Salesforce, emphasizing that a lead often needs further qualification before it can be considered even a prospect and eventually a full customer. A prospect is already a potential customer, whereas a lead is not.

(Jolson 1988; Doyle 2011; Investopedia 2015) Prospecting is the process of identifying potential customers (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 60; Law 2009). It involves defining and understanding what an ideal customer for the company is like and qualifying leads based on how well they meet the profile (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 95; Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 44; Eloqua 2015). Monat (2011, p. 179) defines a lead as being a "recorded expressed interest" towards a company's offering. Erschik (1989, p. 28) states that an inquiry turns into a lead only once it has been qualified, and therefore not every inquiry even becomes a lead.

Once a lead is qualified, it can be seen as entering the company's sales funnel and sales process (Kotler et al. 2006, p. 11; Investopedia 2015). Figure 4 depicts an idea of what a sales funnel could look like, and it can be seen that leads take up the largest single section in the pipeline (e.g. Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 119). It also shows how leads can be considered the starting point of any sales process and the customer relationship related to it.

Figure 4. *Example of a sales funnel (e.g. Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 119).*

In this thesis, the terms lead and sales lead are used synonymously, and are understood in the same way as has been described in this chapter. An inquiry, on the other hand, often refers to a contact request or other form of question that has been submitted by a prospect or customer. An inquiry can become a sales lead. An opportunity emerges when a lead has been qualified to the point that it is managed as a sales case, where a decision to invest resources in developing the case has been made. Lead qualification management means managing how these leads are qualified, and therefore accepted into the sales funnel. Prospects are potential companies that a supplier could work with, while customers are companies that sales have already been done with.

There is, however, debate and differences between and even within organizations on what is considered a qualified lead that sales engineers can actually work with, including differences in terminology used (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 59; Kotler et al. 2006; Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, pp. 51-52; Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 64, 121; Eloqua 2015). Inconsistencies in internal processes can lead to gaps in communication and duplicate work (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 8).

It is often the marketing function's task to generate leads for sales to follow up on (Kotler et al. 2006, p. 11). Typically once a lead has been generated, identified and entered, they will be nurtured to the level required and sent on for follow-up by sales representatives (Erschik 1989, p. 27). The source of the lead can affect how much additional nurturing it needs before it can be considered qualified (Collins 1985, p. 82). For example, the interests of a sweepstakes entrant may be different than those who register for a webinar and actively search for information.

To help with finding a common understanding between sales and marketing functions, one option is to define an ideal customer profile. This includes utilizing sales' knowledge on what a typically qualified lead is like that helps marketing generate and assign leads that sales sees as qualified and potential. (DemandGen Report 2014, p. 6) Existing top customers should also be reviewed, since they should already have the traits of an ideal customer that business has been successful with. They have had a reason to qualify and choose a certain supplier, which indicates similar success could be achieved with other companies that fall into the same segment. (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 95, 154; Ross & Tyler 2012, pp. 28-29) When new employees join the company, they can also be easily educated on the types of prospects their focus should be on, based on the ideal customer profile (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 47).

The profile should be based on historical information, not the desired state. Sales reps are expected to follow up on these leads within an agreed time frame and with actions that correspond to the lead's expected potential. (DemandGen Report 2014, p. 10) Ross & Tyler (2012, p. 48) depict a funnel including some of the criteria that helps companies narrow down what could describe their ideal customer. Criteria in the funnel, in Figure 5, corresponds with criteria used in the customer organization when making decisions about moving forward in a proactive sales opportunity.

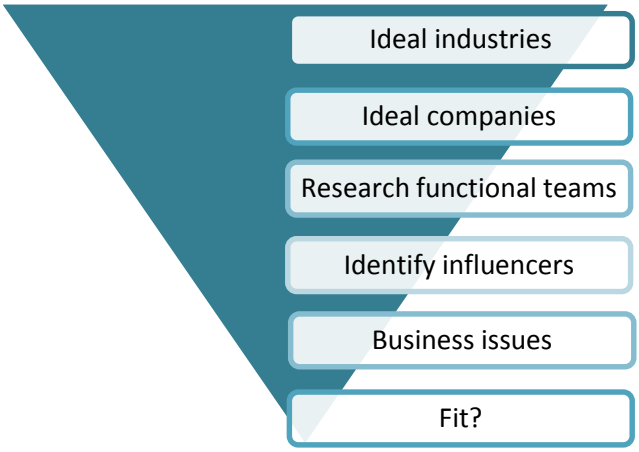


Figure 5. *Ideal customer targeting funnel (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 47).*

In more detail, some of the variables in Figure 5 could include, for example, information about the prospect's geographic location, their size and turnover. This is mostly freely

available information. Additionally their possible attitudes and views about the supplier's offering should be understood to evaluate their suitability. (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 95)

Having a defined sales process with clear objectives is considered a key characteristic of successful sales organizations. Unlike in other company processes, such as production processes, it is typical that the success rate of moving forward from one stage to the next decreases as the process advances. (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 11; Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 92) In the case of prospecting, this means not all leads should be qualified to the stage that an extensive amount of company resources are spent on them and a customer relationship is formed. Often both time and money are spent on leads that aren't seriously interested, taking away from resources that could be spent on prospects that have actual potential (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 201).

At the beginning of a lead process, there is a point of contact with the potential customer. According to Homburg et al. (2001, p. 109) and Roberts-Phelps (2001, pp. 58-61), for someone searching for who to reach at a potential supplier, nothing is more disappointing than having trouble finding that person or not getting a sophisticated and timely answer from them. Something informing them their request has been noted, along with knowledgeable answers and good communication skills on the supplier's behalf can give the potential buyer a better impression of the company they could be buying from. (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 109)

CRM systems often make it possible that there can be more than one contact person in supplier companies that have a large number of customers (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 110). Information can be shared across all employees that are in contact with prospects or customers (Hutt & Speh 2013, p. 73). This can enable more of the supplier's employees to have access to customer and product information, and be better able to respond to queries. If each communication can be codified systematically and combined with transactional information about the customer, potential can be defined based on patterns in past loyalty (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 151).

On the other hand, customer relationship management systems require work from sales to maintain up-to-date information. Without proper recognition of the benefits of use, the CRM may become only another tool without supporting processes. (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 184) When the CRM database is both reliable and has strategic purpose, it can become a "corporate memory" that provides information and knowledge instead of just customer data (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 156).

2.2 Lead qualification

To understand where the leads discussed in this thesis come from, the REAN framework is briefly outlined. REAN stands for "Reach", "Engage", "Activate" and "Nurture", and

was developed as a model to help understand why analytics is an important part of marketing activities. The main idea is to be able to locate what the return on investment (ROI) is on each marketing activity. (Kotler et al. 2006, pp. 3-4; Jackson 2009, pp. 24-26) Each successful sale should be possible to directly associate with the marketing effort that generated the lead (Collins 1985, p. 78; Erschik 1989, p. 27).

More often than not, the role of marketing is not visible in sales management reports, making it difficult to understand its significance (Kotler et al. 2006, p. 11). Marketing activities and lead generation in general are out of scope for this thesis; however, the later phases of REAN can be seen as sources of data for sales leads and activities. The REAN framework has been used as a source of guidance for lead activities at the customer organization, which also justifies its use in this thesis.

In Figure 6 is a simplified version of Jackson's (2009, p. 27) example of REAN. Finding potential buyers often starts with sales lead generation, which includes marketing activities such as seminars, trade shows, search engine optimization (SEO) and advertising (Collins 1985, p. 77; Ramakrishnan et al. 2006, p. 1; Ross & Tyler 2012, pp. 113-117). On the left, under "Reach" are ways a company can aim to initially generate leads, and, in this case, try to direct them to their websites to be able to track how well they have been reached.

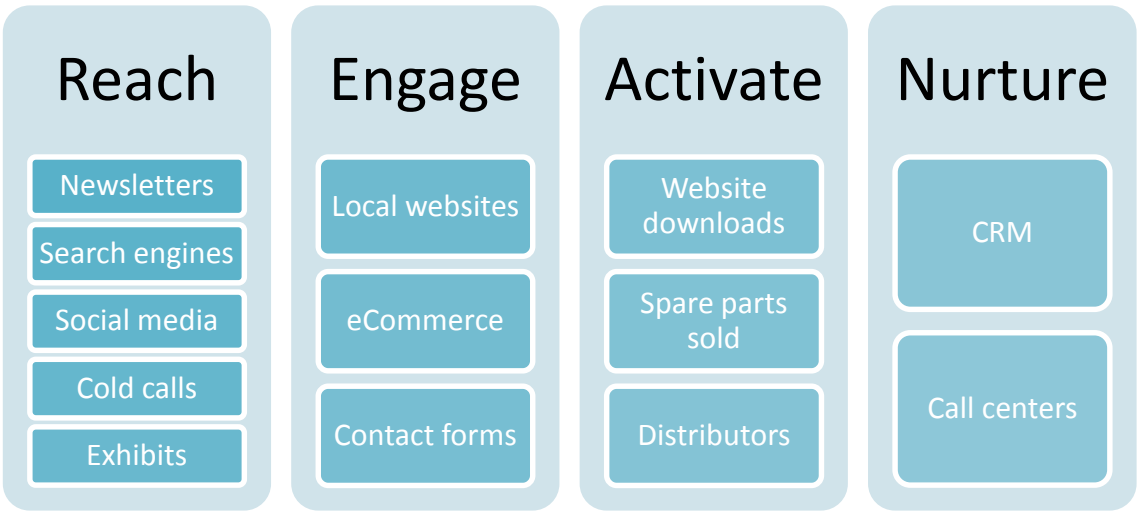


Figure 6. *The REAN framework (adapted from Jackson 2009, p. 27).*

Once there, the goal is to "Engage" visitors to interact with the company through the website, for example, by filling out a contact form or browsing the web shop. (Jackson 2009, pp. 27-34) Contact with the potential customer can either be reactive, where the customer has responded to a marketing campaign and contacted the supplier, or proactive, where the supplier contacts the prospect without prior lead information, and tries to solve if they could be a qualified lead (Ramakrishnan et al. 2006, p. 1).

The next stage, “Activate” is where engagement has succeeded (Jackson 2009, p. 36). This is typically the stage where a potential customer would request a quotation, providing both their contact details as well as their product interests, and turning themselves into a potential sales lead. They want to be contacted by the company offering products or services and they trust and know the company enough to give them their contact information. (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 121) Marketing is often able to support sales at this phase by providing material that can promote the customer’s decision, such as case studies (Kotler et al. 2006, p. 11). Activation can happen in several phases: first, a website visitor can activate to become a prospect, after which they activate more and become a customer (Jackson 2009, p. 37).

An important part of activation is making sure the right potential customers are reached. Once they are identified, it is crucial to find alignment between the selling and buying companies’ goals, or otherwise the customer relationship may not be worth pursuing. Data that is tied to initial information about a lead can help identify which ones are the “right” ones, that both have an interested contact person and where the related company has actual buying potential. (Jackson 2009, pp. 37-38) An ideal contact profile, similar to an ideal customer profile, can also be defined to help find who at a prospect would usually be the correct contact to actively influence, who can further internally influence the decision to make a purchase (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 95; Ross & Tyler 2012, pp. 49-50).

As a typical rule, relationships with prospects that have both high potential and high probability to convert should be developed with the highest priority, such as is demonstrated in Figure 7 (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 118). An ideal customer profile should describe customers that are in the “Develop with priority” quadrant (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 47). On the other hand, the supplier company also needs to be active and available when any form of inquiry is received, and ready to respond promptly (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 247). A response should be given regardless of the lead’s initially presumed priority or potential.

This does not, however, always mean that a quotation should be sent out to the prospect. Ross & Tyler (2012, p. 102) propose that the prospect should “earn” proposals by first engaging in collaboration with the supplier. This way, the supplying company is able to get more details and therefore is also able to create an offer that better suits the prospect’s needs. If the prospect is truly interested and worth a salesperson’s time, they will be willing to share more information both internally and to the potential supplier. (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 102)

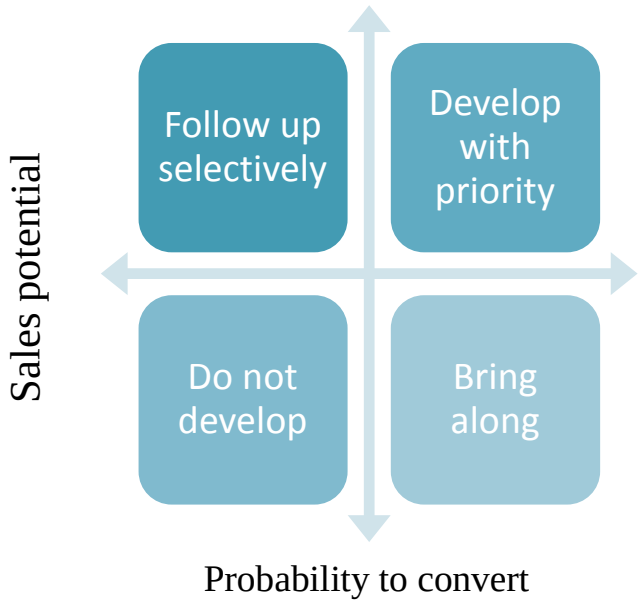


Figure 7. *Relationship development matrix (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 118; Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 47).*

DemandGen International (2014, p. 5) compares the level of a lead's qualification with the interest level of the prospect, and demonstrates a similar matrix, segmenting prospects with the highest potential as A, and giving classification all the way to E, where leads are neither highly qualified nor do they show the right level of interest. Each customer segment is managed differently, and therefore segments should be defined so that similar actions can be taken based on customer needs. Segmentation should start with analysis of customer behaviors and needs, after which the characteristics, such as industry or company size, of the companies with these needs can be evaluated. (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 153)

Roberts-Phelps (2001, pp. 57-72) offers an alternative to the REAN framework, the customer interaction cycle. Figure 8 shows how it follows the same main phases as REAN – prospects are initially given information, after which communication between the prospect and their potential supplier engages. These are the receiving and understanding phases of the customer interaction cycle. When helping the prospect find a solution, activation occurs on both sides of the relationship. Eventually, keeping the customer is essential for being able to nurture the relationship and begin the cycle again with new requirements and customer challenges.

Figure 8. *The customer interaction cycle (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 57).*

Jackson (2009, p. 44) depicts the REAN marketing funnel, and a similarity to a company's typical sales funnel (Figure 4) can be seen. Only select cases progress all the way from top to bottom and selection is done by both customer and supplier (e.g. Homburg et al. 2001). Failures in selection on either side can lead to a costly waste of resources. Comparing to an ideal customer profile can also help identify which cases definitely not to actively work on, as they would most likely be a waste of time for both supplier and customer (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 48). For example, if recognizing that the prospect is using a system that has reached the end of its lifecycle is a trigger event, prospects that have just recently updated their system probably won't actually buy, even if they are doing research on what systems are generally out there.

According to Roberts-Phelps (2001, pp. 28-29), customers can have different lifecycle stages that correspond closely to the REAN framework's different stages as well as a typical sales or marketing funnel. The phases described are Contact, Acquisition, Retention and Loyalty, each of which has goals according to what kind of activities are conducted with a customer at that phase to move them to the next, if qualified (Roberts-Phelps 2001, pp. 28-29). To help predict each individual prospect's or customers value, they can also be assigned a status based on their potential and activities that have been ongoing with them. "Cold" accounts have been unresponsive, "working" accounts have ongoing discussions and qualification is ongoing, while "nurturing" companies have been qualified. In contrast, accounts can also be given an "avoid" status, as they have been disqualified from current sales activities for some reason. (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 71)

A lead's lifecycle in this thesis can be seen as starting with marketing activities, as described in the REAN framework, or some variation of it. The REAN framework is spe-

cifically fitting for this research, as the legacy tool used at Metso is a web lead management tool and the new tool will support some level of analytics through reports and dashboards. According to Jackson (2009, p. 26), appropriate analysis of measured online activities can help a business focus its resources more tactically. This is in line with the objectives of this research – to know what kinds of inputs can generate revenue by successfully managing which leads are most likely to convert to sales.

Marketing automation company Marketo has defined their lead qualification process based on a scoring system. In their terminology, a "prospect" is the first stage, whereas a "lead" is considered more qualified and potential, and has more than 65 points. Points have been added based on defined rules that estimate potential. (Ross & Tyler 2012, pp. 122-127) The full process can be seen in Figure 9. When the website visitor has activated, their potential is scored based on a series of aspects, such as how much time they spent on the website, and actions are taken and followed up accordingly (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 91; Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 126). Using some sort of systematic scoring or rating method for lead potential improves the ability to estimate which leads are "hot" and which customers have profit potential (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 153).

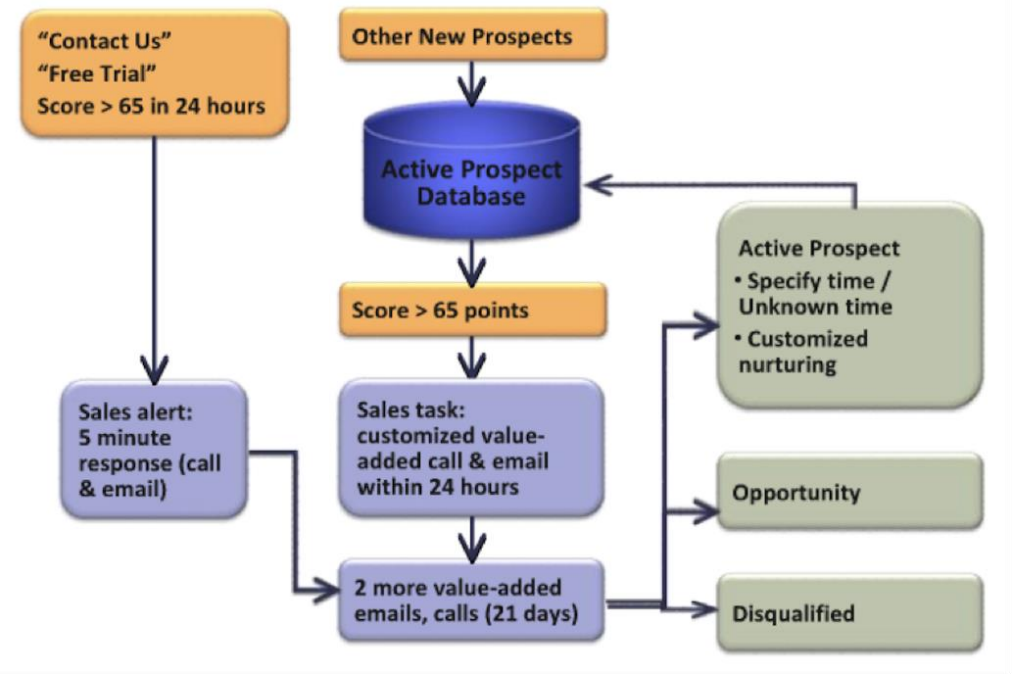


Figure 9. *The lead lifecycle by Marketo (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 126).*

Marketing consultancy company DemandGen International provides a service where lead scoring models function similarly to matching on online dating sites – the hottest leads indicate a compatible match from both supplier and prospect points of view. (DemandGen Report 2014, pp. 2-3) Using computerized and automated scoring allows for faster and consistently forwarded sales inquiries, in addition to giving visibility to the source of the lead, such as a certain campaign (Taylor 1983, according to Collins 1985, pp. 77-78).

Giving the lead a score or rating is a typical way to predict its probability of converting into an opportunity or sale and identifying customers with the most buying potential (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 164; Monat 2011, p. 180). Scoring variables are related to data elements of the lead, such as the prospect's intention and ability to buy, timing of the inquiry and how well the supplier's product would correspond with its intended use at the customer. Pre-scoring leads improves the follow-up success rate for qualified leads, since prospects with serious buying intention can be identified earlier on in the sales process. (Erschik 1989, p. 29)

Scoring leads allows them to be ranked based on potential and the time that should be initially spent on developing relationships with them. In addition to the lead activity which starts off the lead lifecycle, segmentation information about the website visitor's company should also be used to alter the score. (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 165; Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 91; DemandGen Report 2014, p. 11) It is, however, important to understand that segmentation and lead scoring are not the same thing, instead, a prospect's perceived segment should affect the score of the lead, along with other characteristics and data that is tied to the lead (e.g. Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 159). This information can be used especially in comparing the lead to the ideal customer profile. Being able to determine which properties of the lead have the most significant impact on its quality is essential for being able to successfully define metrics for lead qualification systems, such as lead scoring (Monat 2011, p. 179).

In contrast to profiling ideal customers, other types of buyer profiles can also be defined to support predictability of lead conversion (DemandGen Report 2014, p. 10). What a lead's score consists of, where the points have come from, could affect how the lead should be managed. This could be the case, for example, for highly interested prospects that are just doing research, but are currently not in the position to make a purchase.

While sales representatives may have a valid intuition of which leads convert to opportunities, they rarely use scoring models or other tools proactively to validate a lead's quality (Monat 2011, p. 178). Skilled sales representatives may score even without a system in place, but it may become subjective. Due to this, some level of automation in lead qualification is often called upon. Scoring helps ensure that a lead's potential is evaluated objectively and based on facts, instead of individual sales representative's judgment (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 60). Marketing may also participate in scoring, for example by defining segmentation based on corporate strategy or helping create lead qualification standards (Kotler et al. 2006, p. 4, 11).

Segmentation in B2B markets can be done by characteristics of the customer. External characteristics include much of the information that is easily available online, such as industry, company size and area of operation. The company's trade, core competence, structures and processes will also affect segmentation. More dynamic criteria include

people and events within the company. (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 46) Ramakrishnan et al. (2006, p. 2) consider these types of events trigger events, which may make the prospect more or less important during different points of time. Products or services the prospect is already using and especially their lifecycle phase can also give information about potential and upcoming trigger events (Roberts-Phelps 2001, pp. 145-146).

Scoring models can be considered somewhat similar to the ABC analysis, which is typically used for segmenting a company's products by their profitability. Customers can also be segmented by their importance as A, B or C, and attention should be given to them based on their segment. By using tools such as the ABC analysis and scoring models to identify lead potential, resources can be better allocated to the correct customers and therefore sales force productivity increased. (Homburg et al. 2001, pp. 164-167) Segmentation should help the company find prospects that fit a certain criteria and can be responded to accordingly. Variables for segmentation should be based on what are actually relevant qualification criteria. (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 47)

To create a full "customer portfolio" to fill in information gaps caused by other tools, questions such as the following should also be addressed (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 167):

- What is the supplier's current market share with the customer?
- What is the current demand for the supplier's products or services and how much could it increase? At what price?
- Could the customer be strategically important in the future as an industry leader or collaborator?

Based on this information, a company should be able to reach a decision about how much to invest into a customer relationship. Since the customer portfolio refers to the supplier's current position with the customer, it is not so suited for identifying prospect customers. For a "prospect portfolio", it should be evaluated how likely it is that a customer can be acquired. This depends on both attractiveness of the customer to the supplier as well as attractiveness of the supplier to the potential customer. Things such as existing relationships the customer may have with other suppliers and ability of the supplier to supply resources to serve the customer have a strong effect on the level of attractiveness. As a result, the main focus questions for a prospect portfolio could be the following (Homburg et al. 2001, pp. 169-170):

- How is the prospect currently committed (to other suppliers)?
- What are the prospect's wants, needs and requirements?
- What can the supplier offer?

From these questions, it is crucial to conclude that the prospect could commit to a new supplier and that the supplier's offering should correspond to the prospect's requirements

before making a decision to invest in the relationship. Investing, in this case, means making more resources better available to the customer and increasing the level of collaboration, while deciding not to invest in a relationship could mean decreasing the support level. (Homburg et al. 2001, pp. 170-171)

As part of analyzing a prospect's attractiveness, the potential cost can be compared to expected profitability. The focus should not be on which supplier products generate the most profit, but which individual customers could bring the most revenue. (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 176) This often requires the ability to capture enough transactional data about existing customers to be able to predict what segments could also provide value in the future (Roberts-Phelps 2001, pp. 149-150). A customer's lifecycle value (CLV) can be calculated based on revenues and costs (Homburg et al. 2001, pp. 178-179), but this level of detail will not be explored within this thesis, though it can be a useful tool when deciding which prospect relationships to invest in.

When the needed revenue from different kinds of sales can be determined, an enlightened prediction can be made about how much and what kind of resources are needed to reach set targets. Acquiring new customers requires a certain expected amount of resources as the relationship progresses through the funnel, making it possible to calculate also the need for highly potential and qualified leads. On the other hand, targets have to be realistic – if a saturation of customers has already been reached within a certain market, resources for acquiring new customers should be focused elsewhere. (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 131) Segmentation helps identify where development activities should be concentrated, as possible expenses of acquiring customers per segment should also be possible to estimate. Resource allocation in both sales and marketing can be decided upon per segment based on facts, such as what percentage of sales the segment is expected to generate. (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 154, 160)

Jolson (1988) and Jolson & Wotruba (1992) define the requirements of being a qualified prospect similarly to Homburg et al. (2001). The main points are that the supplier should be able to satisfy an identified need of the prospect, the prospect is in a position where it is able to buy and the supplier is able to contact and communicate with the prospect. If all criteria can be met, a lead can be qualified. (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 60) Dannenberg & Zupancic (2010, p. 47) agree that companies with a segmentation that indicates potential business should be possible to influence through different channels and the supplier's and prospect's goals should correspond.

It is good to note that a customer's buying process is also often a key indicator on which lead properties actually matter for the lead to qualify, as well as combining individual requirements to create meaning (Monat 2011, p. 179; Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 93). This is also demonstrated in Figure 10. Monat (2011) proposes a lead qualification model where characteristics of a lead are based on the variables of a prospect's buying process. The

variables are investigated further in chapter 3 as data elements tied to leads. In the proposed model, historical leads are analyzed and variables are identified from the included information. Each variable can be rated as positive, negative, neutral or unknown, depending on its contribution to the lead's potential to qualify and convert to an opportunity. An average score can then be calculated to predict the lead's quality. (Monat 2011, p. 188) The stage at where the lead is in a customer's buying process can also be a variable in scoring, giving the lead more potential as it moves forward (Roberts-Phelps 2001, pp. 91-92; DemandGen Report 2014, p. 8).

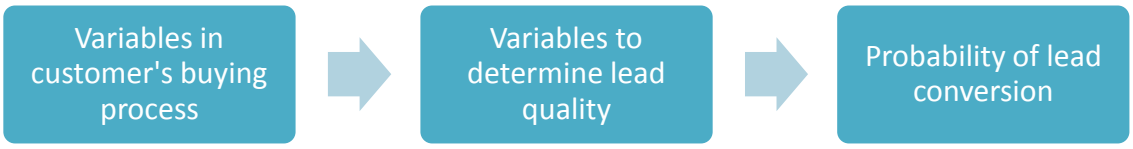


Figure 10. *Customer's buying process as criteria for lead qualification (Monat 2011, p. 184).*

When studying historical leads, correlation between leads with high scores that have converted into sales and leads with low scores that haven't been followed up on can indicate that qualification variables in lead data have been correctly identified. This can also help predict how future leads will convert to sales (Monat 2011, p. 188). According to Ross & Tyler (2012, p. 50), knowing about a customer company's and their main contact's core challenges is an important part of defining an ideal customer profile. Historical leads can also help find what kinds of challenges customers come to Metso with and which of these challenges have been possible to aim to answer to. In the end, the lead qualification model should not be too complex, but give visibility of the ability to generate and identify quality leads and convert those into sales (Erschik 1989, p. 30).

Though the customer's buying process can be considered one of the main sources for characterizing leads (Roberts-Phelps 2001; Monat 2011), typical and specific buying processes will not be investigated in more detail within the scope of this thesis. For example, in different markets and industries, criteria for a qualified lead can differ significantly. Monat (2011, p. 183) also brings up an example of a prospect with an urgent need, but the need may only be for an information pamphlet instead of a product. The buying process is expected to differ somewhat per customer and therefore the guidelines developed within the scope of this thesis should take that into account.

Regardless of qualification methods, it is still possible that leads are approached that will never become prospects or customers (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 62). "False positives" can also turn up, where a lead's score indicates it is highly potential, but there is no real interest. False positives can also be the result of a flawed scoring method that may be too simplified. (DemandGen Report 2014, p. 10)

2.3 Roles in the prospecting process

According to Jolson & Wotruba (1992, pp. 60-61), leads can be divided into three types depending on who has generated them. A company can aim to generate leads through campaigns, and the potential of the lead will depend on how much the campaign response fuels the buying decision. If the reaction to an inquiry is a visit by a sales person, the lead is more likely committed than if sending an inquiry qualifies for a contest entry with little or no relation to the supplier's actual products. (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, pp. 60-61)

Prospects or existing customers can also initiate leads. Experiences from other customers and consumers can be reviewed to see how satisfied others have been with a supplier's products or services. Sources can be word-of-mouth as well as reviews (e.g. online), consultants and reports. (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 61) Referrals from existing customers can be considered a very effective way to generate new leads (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 96). Company and prospect-initiated leads do not require direct effort from salespeople, instead, they are often provided. Leads generated directly by sales through cold calls or other methods are considered effort leads. The method of cold calling is described later in this chapter in more detail. In the same way as non-effort leads, these require qualification by different criteria, such as those described in chapter 2.1. (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 61) Sales people may be relied on to do qualification work for the leads provided to them (Erschik 1989; p. 28).

Lead generation often requires effort from the sales force in smaller companies where they may not be enough resources for leads to be generated though other methods. Also, if leads initiated by the company or other prospects are not good in quality, sales representatives may feel the need to put more of their own effort into lead generation. Realizing this is the case should result in re-evaluation of lead generating capabilities as well as improving communication between lead generating functions and sales representatives. (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 65)

Eventually, though, the field of non-effort leads may become saturated, once the majority of potential prospects have been found. After that, prospecting will require an increased amount of effort, mostly through methods such as cold calling, to find new leads. (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 65) Using the time of sales executives for such activities is expensive, which in turn supports the need to re-evaluate how lead management roles should be distributed. On the other hand, reps can do prospecting with their existing customers, to identify and generate new business in already established customer relationships. (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 31)

How a company identifies its prospects and manages leads has a direct effect on its salespeople. Their needed qualifications and capabilities will depend on whether their work consists more of generating effort leads by cold calling or if they receive non-effort leads from other lead generation sources. Compensation should also be determined based on

what kind of selling the representative has been hired to do. (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 65) In Figure 11, Ross & Tyler (2012, p. 37) display an example of how roles related to lead and customer relationship can be defined in an organization to support competences in both lead generation as well as customer retention activities.

Figure 11. *Example of core sales roles (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 37).*

In the example in Figure 11, sales development generates qualified opportunities for account executives, who close sales deals before handing over customers to customer success / account management responsible for retention activities. Sales reps often have either the skills to hunt for and acquire customers or retain ("farm") relationships with existing customers, but more rarely both. Having structured and dedicated teams for both purposes allows for better focusing of resources, but can also lead to challenges in handovers. In any case, the competence of each employee should be used to the company's advantage, but the different types of customer activities taken into account. (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, pp. 150-154)

How marketing functions are organized and what their tasks include is also affected by lead management. As the size of a company grows, it is typical for marketing to take on more lead generation and qualification tasks, also creating a need for close collaboration between sales and marketing functions within a company. (Kotler et al. 2006, p. 4) Having a clear lead management framework with incorporated scoring and stages based on lead maturity helps define roles and activities related to each phase of sales lead development in addition to making handover from marketing to sales smoother (DemandGen Report 2014, p. 8). Without a clear division of work, even qualified leads may not be followed up on at all. The cost of a sales call becomes too high if a sales rep needs to make twenty calls to generate one sale, while the correct contact should be possible to identify in just a few calls. (Erschik 1989, p. 29)

Kotler et al. (2006, p. 11) present a customer buying funnel, which resembles the sales funnel depicted in Figure 4 and the REAN marketing funnel Jackson (2009) describes. The buying funnel represents a more customer-centered approach to progressing from a suspect to a fully qualified and dedicated customer. The whole funnel can be seen in Figure 12. Based on it, marketing and sales have clear responsibilities, and intruding into the other's territory is not common (Kotler et al. 2006, p. 11). Ross & Tyler (2012, p. 64)

depict a similar funnel, from which it can be clearly seen that while the volume of activities decreases as the process moves ahead, their value to the company increases all the way from confirming qualification to closing the sales deal. The funnel can be seen as another version of the REAN framework, where activities also become more focused the further the relationship moves in the process.

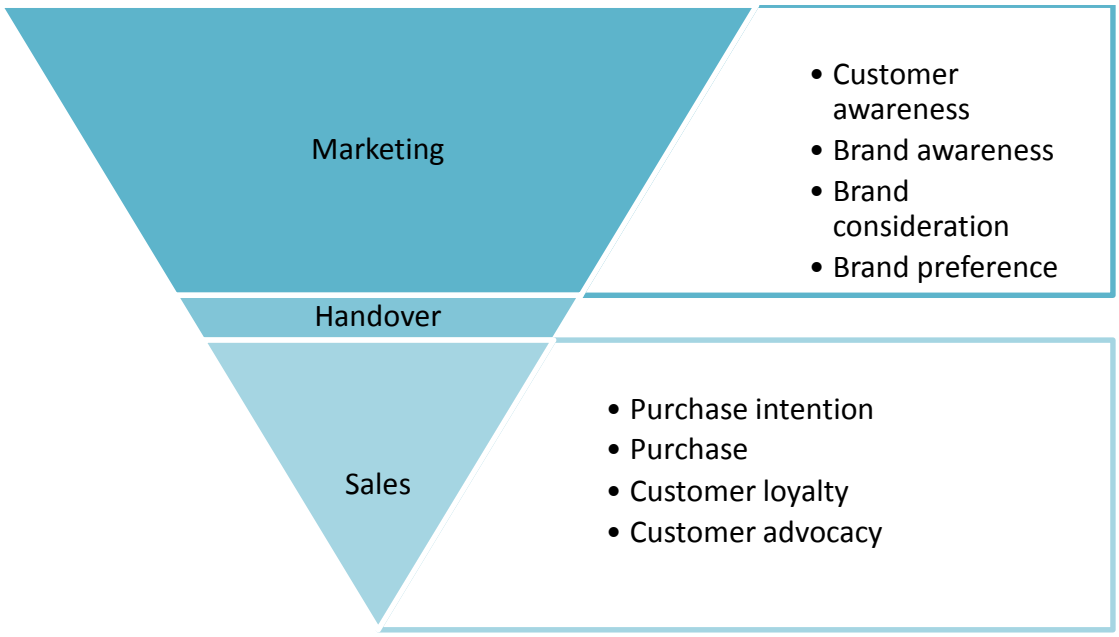


Figure 12. *The buying funnel (Kotler et al. 2006, p. 11).*

Once leads have entered the funnel through different sources, some level of research and qualification come in to help prioritize which cases have the most potential. Cases identified as "hot" or "tight" leads will most likely be called or visited while "cold" or "loose" leads may be responded to with minimal effort, such as by sending marketing material. On the other hand, there are also plenty of qualified leads out in the field that the supplying company has not found and, therefore, has not reached their promotional efforts out to. The needs of these prospects have often been satisfied by competitors, as a result of which they themselves also do not independently reach out to new, potential suppliers. (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 63)

If an inquiring company is considered a qualified prospect and they are on the warmer end of the qualification scale, a quotation still may not automatically be sent when requested. In these cases, criteria have been evaluated and though the prospect may be qualified on paper, there could be other reasons to not give them top priority. (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 63) For example, a prospect committed to another supplier may get better benefits from the existing relationship regardless of how good of an offer the new potential supplier can make. For the potential supplier, it may not be worth giving high discounts just to gain a customer, as they may not be profitable in the future due to this very reason. Instead, high priority is given to hot leads, and resources are focused on them (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 63).

There also exist hot leads that may be erroneously qualified. These can be, for example, prospect-initiated, where an existing customer has made a referral, yet the lead isn't quite qualified according to scoring models in use. Also, prospects that fit the profile of a qualified lead may already be using a competing supplier's products or services that the salesperson hasn't known about. In that case, their curiosity in new products is just that: curiosity, without any actual intention to make a purchase. Perceived interest can also be caused by a salesperson's own interpretations. (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, pp. 63-64)

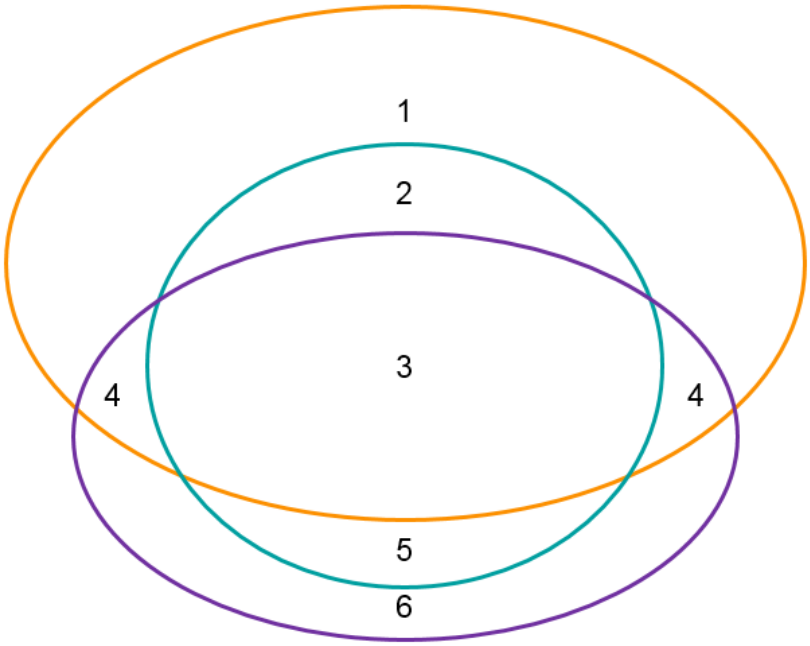
Cold calling is a method for contacting both unqualified as well as qualified companies that have not been identified yet through any form of lead generation. These can be, for example, new companies that have not yet been listed. Contacts that are identified as qualified become prospects, while unsuitable contacts are disqualified. However, without accurate qualification processes, the ratio of disqualified to qualified cold contacts may be high, resulting also in generating very little sales in relation to the number of calls. (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, pp. 64-65)

Ross & Tyler (2012, p. 24) define a cold call as a method of prospecting where the potential customer isn't expecting or prepared for your call, and instead propose "cold calling 2.0" as a more successful method. The main idea of the method is to initially ask for reference to the correct interested person by email, who will then be expecting your call and also be prepared for it. Being able to generate interest this way should improve the predictability of a sales pipeline, since the ideal contacts are possible to identify with the first call. (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 24)

Whoever is responsible for prospecting can also take another approach, and with the first call, intentionally only talk to a receptionist or assistant who helps identify the correct person. The interested, correct contact is likely to be found and they can be directly approached in writing. (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 98) In the same way, this allows for the interested person to be prepared for the call. On the other hand, depending on the type of customer being approached, the receptionist or assistant may not be familiar enough with the whole organization to be able to identify the correct contact. When there is a clear framework for identifying prospects in place, calls should be automatically directed at the right contacts and be more likely to lead almost directly to sales (Erschik 1989, p. 30).

The number of unqualified leads that are contacted may grow with the number of calls made in general, but so should the amount of qualified prospects. This is a necessary tradeoff when making contact with leads, but not contacting possibly qualified leads also presents its own risks that many companies and their salespeople aren't willing to take. For example, knowledge of competitors' success is a good indication that not enough qualified leads have been contacted, since sales cases aren't being won. On the other hand, the company's own lead qualification processes may not be efficient or it might not be followed by salespeople if lots of unqualified leads are being contacted in relation to qualified leads. (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, pp. 64-65)

Jolson's & Wotruba's (1992) prospecting model is depicted in Figure 13. The numbers represent regions of different types of companies, depending on whether or not they have been qualified and contacted. The largest circle, which includes region 1, represents the entire field of potential companies that could be qualified, so called "suspects". Of those, only some are prospects – represented by the circle in the middle. Finally, there is a group of companies that are actually contacted, including those that were not originally considered potential customers. Suspects should suit the profile of what a strategic target customer should be like – if the goal is to increase sales through collaboration across business areas, target customers should have needs for several business areas' offering (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 121).



1	Not qualified or contacted	4	Contacted erroneously, not qualified
2	Qualified, not contacted	5	Contacted by cold calls, qualified
3	Qualified and contacted	6	Contacted by cold calls, not qualified

Figure 13. *A prospecting relationship model (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 62).*

Overall, both the lead generating function's as well as sales' understanding of a qualified prospect should develop over time, so that eventually most qualified leads can be reached and most disqualified leads can be left alone. Directing the use of company resources correctly should generate growth and profit, since the ideal customers are more likely to be found. Companies should investigate how they can best use the information their own sales force is able to provide, such as success rates of cold calling or information stored in call reports. (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 65) The nurturing phase of REAN concentrates on developing the customer relationship that was created at latest in the activation phase.

For B2B companies, CRM systems are the most typical ways to track and manage nurturing activities. The key is to have all interactions related to one customer logged in the same place, whether the activities happen online or offline. This could include information on customer visits, calls, web inquiries and call center claims. (Jackson 2009, pp. 38-41)

CRM systems provide a platform for all communications and information related to a single prospect to be tracked, with several people having access to the information. They can also be used to report and steer which customers should be given the most attention. Strategically sharing this information increases cross-functional involvement, which can help in the development of a sales case. (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 185, 219; Ross & Tyler 2012, pp. 22-23) While CRM is discussed here mainly as a system, it is crucial to understand its role also as a mindset and group of processes used for managing customer and contact relationships successfully and systematically. This requires a customer-focused strategy in the organization, but also identifying what practical tools are needed in the processes. (Hutt & Speh 2013, pp. 72-73)

Kotler et al. (2006) emphasize the importance of communication, especially between sales and marketing functions, but also with other business areas, to help support each other when products and services are being both developed and sold. Other functions, such as product support or logistics, can also participate in the sales process and assist with their knowledge (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, pp. 154-156). Communicative CRM systems can often be considered "workflow systems", meaning that functionality follows business processes. The execution of a process is documented within the system so that anyone viewing it should be able to understand what activities have taken place, for example, with a certain customer. (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 206) Seeing from activities that there have been several inquiries about a topic from within one company can be a good indication of increased interest and potential (Roberts-Phelps 2001, pp. 146-147).

At the customer organization, CRM is used for both communicative and analytical purposes. Data from other sources is combined into the CRM system to improve visibility and help develop a full view of customer activities. The data can be utilized, for example, in different kinds of reports and dashboards that support the user in data analysis (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 206). Systems should also provide signals to users, causing them to take actions. The outcomes of the actions taken give good indication of the usefulness of the information the signals provide. (Wand & Wang 1996, p. 87)

After the end of the lead management process, a stage should be reached where satisfied and profitable customers should be kept that way: retention and relationship development (Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 59; Homburg et al. 2001, p. 251, 281). Qualifying and finding the most suitable leads is of no use, if the attained customers are not given reasons to stay. This, however, could be discussed as an entire topic on its own, and has therefore been left out of the core scope of this thesis.

3. INFORMATION IN LEADS

This chapter aims to answer the following research questions:

- What kinds of data and information are tied to leads?
- How can the quality of leads and lead information be evaluated and improved?
- What is the role of analytics in lead qualification?

The data tied to leads is solved by evaluating the different data variables that can coded on a single lead record. Information tied to leads further explores different kinds of information and knowledge that may not be as easily codified, and what its significance could be. Different information quality evaluation frameworks are explored to solve how the quality of leads and lead information could be improved. Finally, different methods for measuring and automating lead management are briefly outlined to help understand how analytics could be used in lead qualification.

3.1 Data and information variables

There is almost unlimited amounts of data that can be collected from different sources, most of them being online. The data can be used to tell a company information about its potential customers as well as be gathered into analytics tools. With the help of these tools, the gathered data can be analyzed and interpreted to further develop business. (Wand & Wang 1996, pp. 86-87; Jackson 2009, p. 3) In other words, data that has been grouped together with different criteria can form reports that further reveal areas the business could aim to improve on. Without an understanding of what these areas are, results are difficult to follow up on (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 136).

The existence of quality data can be considered an essential part of any change processes in an organization (Wand & Wang 1996, p. 86; Jackson 2009, p. 122). Without it, it is difficult to provide "proof" that an initiative should be taken seriously. For sales management, reports based on accurate CRM data play a valuable role in forecasting and account management (Kotler et al. 2006, p. 11). Future marketing efforts can also be planned based on accurate data about how and which leads have converted into opportunities (Monat 2011, p. 179).

Similarly, accurate data about customers and related transactions helps with the systematic definition and updates of an ideal customer profile (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 144). Structures and differing priorities within an organization can complicate cooperation between different functions, such as sales and marketing, if goals are not aligned. Being able to measure each function's contributions can help motivate working towards a shared

goal, as well as give better feedback on the success of actions and activities. (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, pp. 54-55)

In this thesis, data is important from many perspectives. The qualitative data gathered in interviews and analyzed forms a basis for the development of the lead management process. Observation data from existing databases supports interview findings. Later on, there should be a model of what incoming "quality" data looks like in the new lead management system as well as KPI-based reports providing management with information on, for example, how this data is being managed and acted upon.

Data can also be gathered about leads and prospects, especially related to the segments they do business in. As Jackson (2009, p. 3) mentions, there are enormous amounts of data available online about companies that could be connected with and enrich lead data. Basic information about the company and their current interests are often filled out already by the contact entering lead information onto a web from (DemandGen Report 2014, p. 9). Especially a company's market environment, including information about competitors, existing products, other suppliers and trends, can give sales representatives a more thorough understanding of the prospect's potential as a customer, even before moving forward to analyze their business development needs (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, pp. 75-76, 88-89). This is where the company in question can first begin to be compared to the ideal customer profile. Companies that perceivably fit the profile of a potential or target customer can be considered suspects (e.g. Jolson & Wotruba 1992, p. 62; Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 98; Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 78).

Other than generally available information online, there are several additional sources where information about the lead or its business can already be found. Examples of such sources are information systems, marketing studies, publications, news articles and visit reports. Web listening systems can also be used to automatically identify possible leads based on online information. (Ramakrishnan et al. 2006; Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, pp. 80-81) Visit or call reports as well as articles can offer interesting information about a lead, but typically their content does not follow a certain pattern. This makes standardizing the data and measuring data quality in them challenging. (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 156; Ramakrishnan et al. 2006, p. 2) Quantitative measurement of data is still often called upon to be able to somehow determine quality (Wand & Wang 1996, p. 87).

Regardless of availability of information, it can be better utilized when it is somehow systematically combined and managed, where possible (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 82). Data can be useless even if there is plenty of it, and the key is to pay attention to the quality of data already when producing it (Wand & Wang 1996, p. 87). Valid information is a prerequisite for systematically caring for customers and executing sales activities professionally. This includes information about the customer, such as internal processes and strategic goals, as well as their market environment and competition. (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 11)

Customer information can be categorized into four areas: basic data, potential data, action data and response data. Basic data describes the customer at a very factual level, providing information about who the company is and where they work. (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 161) A company's size can be determined either by the amount of employees or revenue, of which usually the amount of employees is more easily available. Knowledge about company structures, such as different business areas, locations and organizations is basic demographic data that can also be valuable in forming a complete view of the customer. (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 145)

Potential data gives information about the suitability of the customer to the supplier, including their needs, requirements, expectations and potential to develop the customer relationship. (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 162) It can be expected that basic data is, for the most part, easily available, while potential data will require some gathering of information from different sources. For example, the online behavior of a lead contact can often give indication of their potential interest towards a company (DemandGen Report 2014, p. 9). Thanks to the internet, the prospect has access to many sources of information about the company and products before even contacting them. Searching for information online helps the prospect evaluate which supplier could be the most suitable for them. This, of course, requires that supplier websites and other resources provide information in several ways, to be suitable for different types of contacts. If identified a fit, the website path should lead to leaving contact information. (Ross & Tyler 2012, pp. 109-111)

Action data tells more about what actions are being taken within the supplying company related to the buyer. Response data provides information about how successful the actions have been, i.e. if the customer has bought products or services and whether or not they will potentially do so again in the future. Revenue, customer satisfaction and the maturity of the supplier-customer relationship are good indicators in response data. (Homburg et al. 2001, pp. 161-162) Action and response data emerge as the relationship develops, if it does. In comparison to the REAN framework discussed in chapter 2.2, response data can be seen as linked to the Activate phase, while action data could be part of the Nurture phase, where actions related to a certain customer can be tracked in a CRM system.

DemandGen Report (2014, p. 8) also divides information related to leads into categories: demographic data on both the contact and company of the lead, activity data related to the prospect's and suppliers interactions both online and off, and BANT data, based on the known Budget, Authority, Need and Timeline of the lead. This classification is in line with Homburg et al.'s (2001) and also highlights some of the main characteristics that can be seen as data variables of a lead. However, Ross & Tyler (2012, p. 32) emphasize that BANT data is rarely available in typical sales inquiries that have been generated, for example, through a company's website. Information about budget, decision-making and authority, timing and competitor's alternative solutions are all linked to a customer's buying process, and can therefore often differ per customer or even per qualified opportunity (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 121).

Monat (2011, pp. 180-182) has extensively collected the views presented in prior research about what characteristics and data are related to a lead. These views have been collected based on Monat's article into Table 1 below.

Table 1. *Characteristics related to leads (according to Monat 2011, pp. 180-182).*

Variables of a qualified lead	Source
• Timing • Previous purchases and inquiry history • Experience with supplier and their products • Company size • Product suitability to need • Importance of investment • Request for demonstration	Kestnbaum & Hsieh 1983
• Product suitability to need or want • Willingness and ability to purchase • Source of the lead • Company or prospect initiated • Knowledge of how interested the prospect is • Responsiveness	Jolson 1988
• How interested the prospect is • What they want • Resources • Timing • Authority in purchasing decisions	Donath et al. 1995, Donath 1999
• How interested the prospect is and how ready they are to do business • Confidence in and perceived suitability of the supplier	Graham 1996
• Lead source and how it was initiated • Responsiveness and customer's need • Timing • Budget	Hornstein 2005
• Customer's need (to replace existing equipment) • Responsiveness	Grandy 2005
• Customer's need • Timing • Authority in purchasing decisions • Budget and it's state of approval	Coe 2007

For many of the views provided, Monat (2011) criticizes that supporting references and data are often missing, as well as any practical examples or actual reliable methods for evaluating each criterion. However, Monat (2011, p. 192) eventually reaches similar conclusions and defines similar criteria based on his earlier research on the customer's buying process.

Responsiveness in Table 1 refers to a prospect's willingness to correspond with the supplier about the possible sale. In addition to responsiveness, timing, customer need, suitability of the offering and the prospect's level of interest arise in most definitions as key variables related to the quality of a lead. Monat (2011, p. 183, 186) also recognized the same characteristics and an additional few that were supported in several theories, and matched them with corresponding variables he had earlier studied to be part of the customer buying process. Familiarity with the customer's purchasing behavior can help identify who to engage in each sales case as well as which characteristics of a lead are the best indicators of their intention to purchase (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 127).

Determinants of a prospect's purchasing decision often consist mostly of the perceptions they have related to the potential purchase. These perceptions include an evaluation of risk, value for money, timing, need, quality, service and resources. There are often more than one piece of information tied to a lead that can be indicators of each variable. What's often more important than having loads of information is making sure each variable is represented in some way as a lead characteristic and that the relevant information is available. (Monat 2009, according to Monat 2011, pp. 185-186; Monat 2011, p. 187) Due to an information overload from a variety of channels, most of it is easily ignored, highlighting the importance of presenting relevant information effectively instead of providing "too much" information (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 122).

While the authority to make a decision is a variable also highlighted in several of the sources in Table 1, the process related to making the decision may actually be as valuable as a single person. Instead, it is important to understand who all participates in influencing the decision internally at the prospect and shares their opinions with the decision maker, as this can help build the case before the final decision. (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 95-96)

Closely related to the variable "timing" are trigger events at the prospect company that can be considered sales drivers for a supplier's product. For example, organizational changes may call for a demand of new software to better support new or changed processes. Like other variables, sales drivers vary by industry and company. (Ramakrishnan et al. 2006, p. 2) Also knowledge about a company's fiscal year can indicate when they would most likely have the budget to make a purchase (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 145). These, along with any of the other data characteristics of a lead, can be used as a frame for creating an ideal customer profile, or several profiles, depending on the marketing strategy. Profiles will also change over time as business develops, and therefore should be updated regularly. (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 47, 50)

Collecting all the needed information already on a web form to define the characteristics of a lead is usually not best practice (DemandGen Report 2014, p. 10). While collecting basic information about the company and their needs can be typical, in depth information about timing or budget may not be necessary or known when an inquiry is first generated. The threshold for sending the inquiry becomes too high if too much information is required. On the other hand, this can lead to inbound inquiries that cannot be easily considered good in quality or high in potential straight off, since even basic BANT criteria may not be filled to the supplier's qualification standards (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 32).

Characteristics often need to be weighted, combined and customized based on the supplier and prospect to be able to develop the accuracy at which generated leads are converted. Scoring models, such as the ones described earlier in chapter 2, can be of assistance in creating a framework for lead qualification. Additionally, the customer's buying process should indicate how the framework needs to be used per case – i.e. which important variables in the customer's process reflect into lead characteristics and give it quality. It is not necessarily practical to track all variables, as the lead management framework will become unnecessarily complex (DemandGen Report 2014, p. 10).

3.2 Evaluating lead information quality

Data can be considered the basis of information and knowledge, though by itself, it is often meaningless. Data can be numbers or text, but without context. (Sydänmaanlakka 2007, p. 187) Combining, structuring and analyzing data gives it meaning and purpose, and converts it simultaneously to information that can be used, for example, in decision-making (Virtainlahti 2009, p. 32). Data is often quantitative in nature, but its refinement to information and further to knowledge or wisdom gives the single fragments more value and makes them more useful (Kebede 2010).

Knowledge can be considered the product of different pieces of information being connected into networks through understanding and experiences. Knowledge is often required to be able to interpret data and information, and the separation of what is data, information or knowledge is not always clear. (Kebede 2010) While information can often be communicated, knowledge and wisdom are more complex concepts, related closely to the person it is directly linked to and created by (Sydänmaanlakka 2007, pp. 189-190). Figure 14 shows how the development of data to information and knowledge can be considered hierarchical, where the usability and value rises towards the top of the hierarchy.

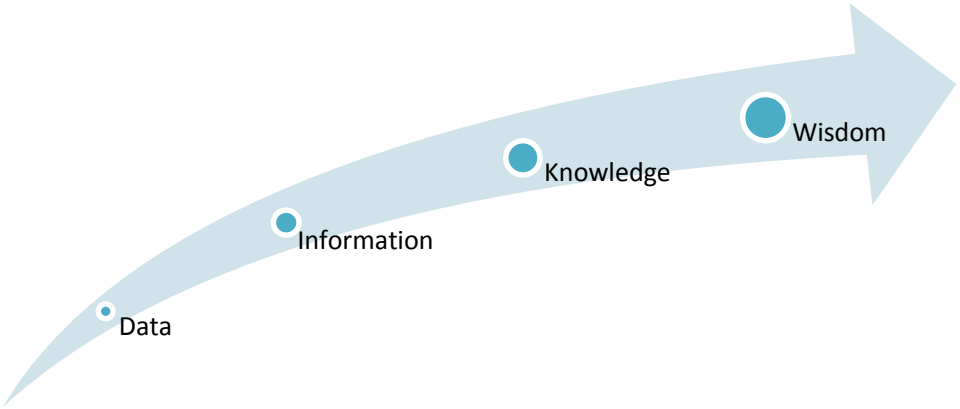


Figure 14. *Hierarchy of data, information, knowledge and wisdom.*

Knowledge is often considered tacit. Tacit knowledge is personal, is not codified and may not even be consciously recognized (Chandler & Munday 2011). Sharing tacit knowledge systematically can be difficult, since it can be based on intuitions and experiences, sometimes leaving us unaware of "why" we even know something, like riding a bike. The individual and subjective nature of tacit knowledge makes it difficult to structure and manage. There are also different views on whether an attempt should be made to codify and share it or if it should be left in a tacit state. (Haldin-Herrgard 2000, pp. 358-359)

Explicit knowledge is the opposite of tacit knowledge, though they can coexist. Explicit knowledge is objective and can be coded, though it is not always, making it unambiguously available to everyone who has access to it. Meaningful interpretation of the information, however, often requires tacit knowledge, similarly to how knowledge is often required to interpret data and information. (Haldin-Herrgard 2000, pp. 358-360; Sydänmaanlakka 2007, p. 197; Kebede 2010) For the purpose of this thesis, the coded data and information tied to a lead as well as defined processes for its management can be considered explicit knowledge, while the practical work of developing a lead into a sale requires tacit knowledge, for example, about customer relationships.

One of the benefits of CRM systems is the availability of information to everyone, if it has been codified and shared. (e.g. Homburg et al. 2001; Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010) According to the SECI framework, knowledge can be transferred in organizations by different methods and new or knowledge of better quality created in the process (Nonaka et al. 2000, p. 9; Chatti et al. 2007). For example a sales call, consisting of interactions based on tacit knowledge, can be recorded into the system as explicit knowledge, and therefore also shared. The kind of tacit knowledge that is possible to codify can also be called implicit knowledge (Virtainlahti 2009, p. 47). The SECI model, in Figure 15, consists of the processes of socialization, externalization, combination and internalization. The SECI model displays different ways of sharing information in an organization, and is considered one of the fundamental models in knowledge management.

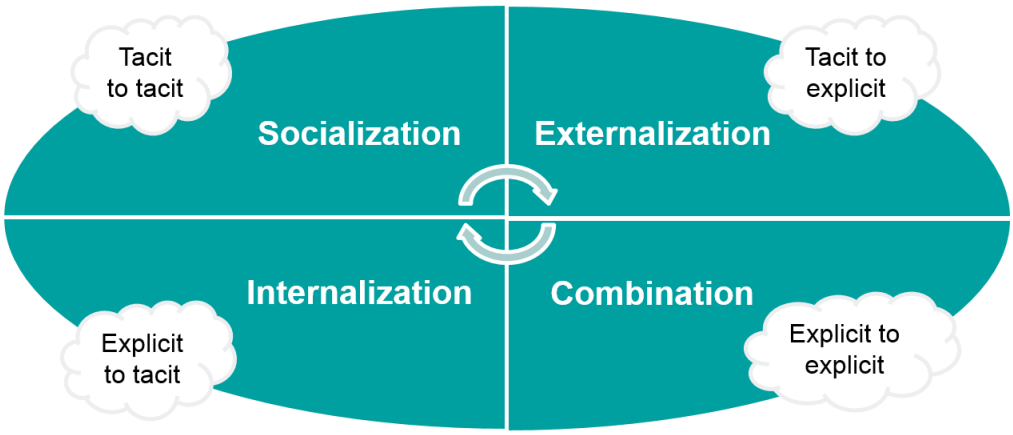


Figure 15. *SECI framework (Nonaka et al. 2000, pp. 9-12).*

For the purpose of this research, it is interesting to find out what kinds of tacit or implicit knowledge can be coded into explicit knowledge in the CRM system. This can be considered part of a codification strategy, where fairly standardized information can be structured to a certain level and stored systematically. Codification of information helps with its effective management and gives better possibilities to analyze and use it. The personalization strategy focuses on passing tacit knowledge within an organization, and should be used alongside the codification strategy. (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2009, p. 82) From the SECI model, externalization and combination deal with the codification of information, while socialization and internalization concentrate on distributing information in a tacit form.

While creating data and information systematically is a crucial first step, its quality is often an indicator of the success of the process that generates it. Quality information is also often a requirement of being able to assist customers of the process that the information is tied to. (Batini et al. 2011, p. 60) A successful sales lead management system should support the ability to respond quickly and professionally to inquiries and the process of qualifying inquiries into actual leads. Additionally, it should help with sales and marketing management by providing quality information to different stakeholders based on their needs. Information and data quality are an important part of the usefulness of the system. (Collins 1985, p. 77)

Typical characteristics of quality data, which can also be implied to information, include "accuracy, completeness, consistency and timeliness". However, many more variables can be used to define quality data and even the definitions of the adjectives used can vary by source. The quality of data can also differ depending on how and what it is used for – while a bit of information may be specific enough for a high-level process description, it may not be enough for application development. When producing data, it is important to understand what it will be used for. (Wand & Wang 1996, p. 87)

The accuracy of data helps users correctly interpret an information system representation as a real-world situation. However, correct interpretations also require the data to be complete and reliable. Erroneous actions can be taken based on incorrect data or missing pieces of information if they are not recognized. Out-of-date data can also lead to errors, and data can be outdated either because it has not been updated to correspond with the real-world state or because the information system has not been able to deliberately deliver the data at the correct time. (Wand & Wang 1996, p. 93) Jackson (2009, p. 122), however, argues that striving for 100% data accuracy can be a waste of time, as there are so many factors that can cause deficiencies.

Organizational data can be heterogeneous, meaning it may be presented in a number of formats and sources, even if it is tied to a single knowledge entity (Batini et al. 2011, p. 61). For example, there can be information about a customer in a CRM system, an ERP system and in the tacit knowledge of a sales representative. Inconsistent data can lead to difficulties in correctly understanding what is being represented in an information system. Values are expected to conform to a certain model and deviations can cause errors in interpreting information. (Wand & Wang 1996, pp. 93-94) Having some level of standardization makes combining data easier, after which patterns should be possible to recognize and create information based on them (Roberts-Phelps 2001, p. 156).

The AIMQ methodology is a framework used for evaluating and measuring the quality of information in an organization, consisting of different tools for assessing the information. "Information" is a generic term in this framework, and therefore does not bind the tools for use only with the definition of information discussed above. (Lee et al. 2002) Instead, it can be adapted to different situations and different types of data, information and knowledge. The AIMQ framework takes into account 15 different information quality dimensions, which are listed in Table 2. Many of the same dimensions are the same or correspond with those discussed by Wand & Wang (1996).

Table 2. *Information quality dimensions in the AIMQ framework (Lee et al. 2002).*

Accessibility	Consistent Representation	Relevancy
Appropriate Amount	Ease of Operation	Reputation
Believability	Free of Error	Security
Completeness	Interpretability	Timeliness
Concise Representation	Objectivity	Understandability

Closely related to data quality is the integrity of data. The systems used within a company need to be reliable in the sense that users from both within and outside of the organization can trust them. Systems should ensure the confidentiality, authenticity and reliability of data at both ends. Security is also an important part of any web page, especially when

leads may be entering their personal information, and can have an effect on the acceptance of the site. (Homburg et al. 2001, pp. 246-247) Systems should also be designed in a way that good quality data can be produced for the purposes it will be used for – this requires an understanding of what data quality is in that case (Wand & Wang 1996, p. 87).

For web analytics tools, Jackson (2009, p. 145) shares Trainers' House Analytics checklist for data quality when implementing and running an analytics tool. To better control and verify data quality, regular data validation, data classification, terminology definition and count accuracy checks should be done. To ensure data is compatible with company processes, also ownership of the data should be reviewed, an audit trail of the data usage should be available and employees should be sufficiently trained in producing and using quality data. (Jackson 2009, p. 145) This is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. *Data quality checklist (Jackson 2009, p. 145).*

Category	Checklist items	Key questions
Data quality verification and control	Data validation	Is data being entered correctly?
	Data classification	What types of data are involved?
	Terminology definition	Are the used terms explained?
	Count accuracy	Is the amount expected/normal?
Data compatibility with company processes	Data ownership	Who is responsible?
	Audit trail	What risks are related to the data?
	Training and process communication	Do staff understand risks related to data?

Aligning information system states and, for example, lead statuses, with the real-world situations ensures the perceptions can be represented as accurately as possible (Wand & Wang 1996, p. 91). While bits of data can be stored in systems, comprehensive knowledge is more difficult to standardize into a format that allows it to be systematically stored. Knowledge that can be coded and structured can be stored in information systems, while strategic expertise is often passed along in human interactions. (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 82) As a result, information cannot be fully systemized, as knowledge that is tied to humans is often required to support system data.

3.3 Analytics in lead management

Different steps in sales work can often be automated or supported by CRM systems, especially when data is utilized to provide intelligence (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 194). When there is enough relevant customer data available, it can be combined and analyzed in several ways to find different types of segmentation scenarios (Roberts-

Phelps 2001, p. 157). Customers that can be already considered highly valuable can be recognized, and prospects further analyzed to help identify which ones would be potentially valuable in the future. Marketing can then be targeted towards existing and potential high-value customers. (Hutt & Speh 2013, p. 72)

The REAN framework discussed in chapter 2.2 is a tool that can be used also to support segmentation, for example, by recognizing what kinds of activities in one phase lead to which activities in the next. Figure 16 shows an example where previous phase activities were investigated for cases where spare parts were sold, meaning the customer Activated. Comparing other activities known about the customer to those who did not purchase can help identify a certain type of customer segment. Other segmentation sources could be by search term (Reach), site behavior (Engage) or loyalty (Nurture). (Jackson 2009, pp. 149-150)

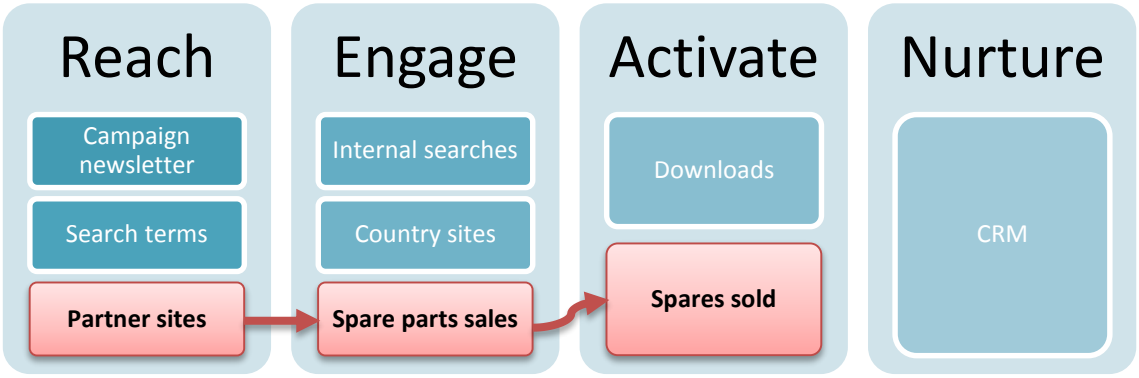


Figure 16. *REAN segmentation activities (Jackson 2009, p. 150).*

Combining information about which companies have visited the supplier web page with existing information in a CRM system is one way to identify possible leads. While identifying individuals online is usually not possible unless they volunteer their information, it is possible to identify companies and their locations based on company network names or direct IP (Internet Protocol) addresses, if they are available. This information can be gathered from a company website using analytics tools, such as Google Analytics. (Jackson 2009, pp. 112-113)

Once the companies of website visitors have been identified, cold calls can be made to these companies. If they are an existing customer, contacts can be reached out to about their current interests or needs. Information about the company's actions on a supplier website may also be available, such as which products they looked at, helping the supplier identify their correct contact at an early phase. While this analysis can be done manually, there are also vendors that have automated the recognition process and can suggest prospects to call based on data it has available. (Jackson 2009, pp. 114-115) While this is more strongly related to lead generation than existing lead management, the high amount of information that can become available helps with the recognition and qualification of the lead at an early phase.

Ross & Tyler (2012, p. 121) propose a model where the prospect contact leaves small bits of information at a time as they progress in the web content. At first they may only be asked to fill out their name and email address. Later on, the information can be pre-filled and more details, such as their position and the company they represent will only need to be filled out. Adding bits of information this way increases the lead score each time something new is learned about the prospect. (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 121) Whether downloading a brochure or registering for a webinar, the contact can become more engaged with each indication of interest they show online.

Virtual recommendation systems are used already in many companies to suggest similar products to a consumer that they have already been viewing (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 249). Similar logic could be possible to use also in searching for the correct leads that match either the ideal customer profile or the profile of an already existing, profitable customer. Lead variable checklists and scorecards can be computerized to help guide a sales representative's work and automatically calculate a lead's quality rather objectively (Monat 2011, p. 189). While sales' work can be highly based on experience and intuition, systematic analysis and consistent procedures ensure better predictability. When processes are aligned with strategy, resources are focused towards reaching high-level targets. (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 219)

Automating lead qualification can enable more dynamic tracking of leads in an organization all the way from lead generation to sales. Marketing automation and CRM systems are often able to support the full process and at the same time, give flexibility in maintaining a scoring framework to facilitate changing requirements. (DemandGen Report 2014, p. 14) Automating parts of the lead management process also allows it to be more self-managing. Where the knowledge of a person can be built into a system, people no longer create bottlenecks with days they are not at work, and the process continues whether or not they apply their knowledge actively. (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 13)

Sending messages through a system that is able to track how many times a campaign email has been opened brings a different kind of knowledge about the lead. Even if a contact has not responded to a message sent to them, seeing they have opened the email multiple times can expose their interest, or even give reason to suspect they have forwarded the message and therefore shared information within their company. (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 58) Embedding beacons, invisible images, into emails or webpages that need to be tracked is one way of gathering this kind of information, as they send data back to the marketer every time the image is loaded (Jackson 2009, pp. 136-137). Tracking of this kind of digital trace is starting to bring new dimensions to lead qualification.

In addition to beacons, other ways to track activities are tags, JavaScript, logs and network sniffers. Each has its limitations and costs, requiring a thorough understanding of business requirements and the goals of tracking to be able to select the most effective method. Accessing a company website, for example, through an internet service provider (ISP)

does not give useful information in the same way as accessing it through a company network would, since information is more anonymous. Similarly, logs capture all kinds of requests that are sent to the web server, including those sent by automated programs through search engines. (Jackson 2009, pp. 137- 138)

People within the company may not often know such tracking and measuring of website visitor activities is possible. However, understanding the behavior of website visitors has been proven to improve the site's ability to generate more leads. (Jackson 2009, pp. 151-153) If a website visitor has lots of activity that is not leading to any engagement or activation, it is possible there is something wrong with the web pages. Continuous errors can cause frustration and eventually even affect the perceptions the visitor has of the brand.

Structured observation of data through reports can tell about the success rates of lead management in an organization. Structured observation consists of systematically gathering data about how often certain events occur in a set of data (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 300). Once sales leads are entered into the system, they can be tracked all the way from when they were entered to the whether the opportunity was won or lost (Collins 1985, p. 77). Tracking lead conversion rates is one of the key metrics that should be tracked (Ross & Tyler 2012, p. 123). This gives visibility into what are the key indicators of a winning case as well as tells management about how many leads they are getting, from what sources, and how often a lead actually generates revenue.

Jackson (2009, p. 123) suggests that web analytics is most effective when clickstream data, experience data and competitive data are combined, and calls this combination the insight model, displayed in Figure 17. Clickstream data is logs of the website visitor's route through a company website. Experience data tells about the prospect's perceptions, and helps explain why their clickstream data is as it is. Competitive data compares success rates to those of other companies, to tell how each company is doing in comparison. (Jackson 2009, p. 123) While growth is usually a good thing, growing significantly less than competitors is not.

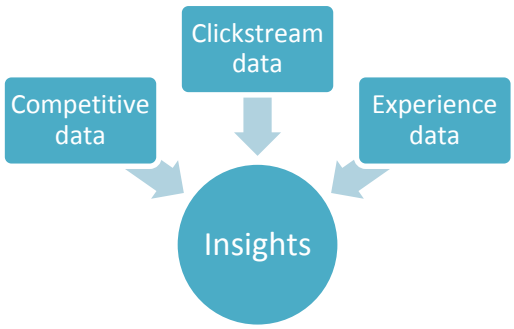


Figure 17. *The insight model (Jackson 2009, p. 188).*

Data gathered based on the insight model can be further used for evaluating actions that should be taken to improve conversion of leads into sales. Scoring is set up based on KPIs

(key performance indicators). For example, if it is found that 10% of web inquiries lead to sales, and the target is to double the amount of web inquiries leading to sales, either more web inquiries are needed or the percentage needs to go up. In this case, the target of 20% of web inquiries leading to sales should be given a score '3' on a scale of 1 to 5, meaning the target has been reached. Less conversions means a lower score, while exceeding the target gives a higher score. Scoring is mostly a way to simplify data so that it is easier to interpret. Also, it becomes easier to compare the ability to reach targets in different business areas that may have different KPIs. (Jackson 2009, pp. 189-190)

Reporting should be built so that the people the report is aimed at can take actions based on it, without needing to further analyze it (Jackson 2009, p. 227). Without knowing the "why", the "what" is not nearly as useful. Jackson (2009, p. 239) proposes a process for reporting, in Figure 18. Once KPIs have been defined, requirements and sources of data can be identified, as well as data collected. Basic data at this stage can come from more than one source, and combining it may be challenging. Once data has been structured, scoring can be done based on the rules that have been defined based on targets.

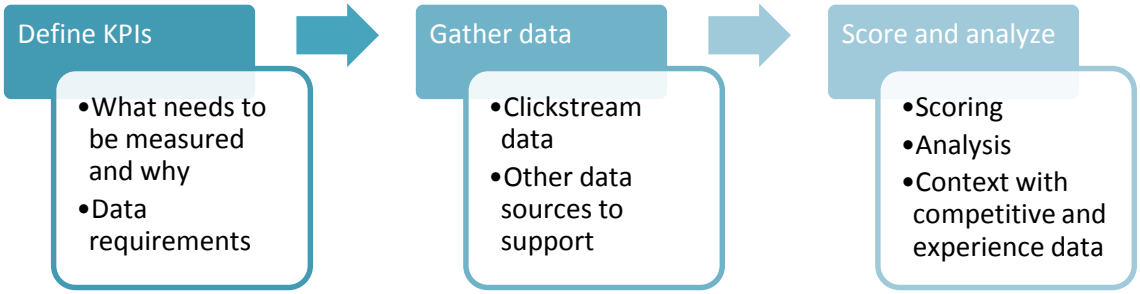


Figure 18. *Reporting process for analysts (Jackson 2009, p. 239).*

With scores in place, anyone viewing the data is able to quickly get an overview of how well targets are being reached in each area being analyzed. Drilling down to a more detailed level of data should give more information about why there isn't success in that area or why the score has been declining. (Jackson 2009, p. 240) On the other hand, knowing which areas are most successful can also be a source of useful information. If some method is generating revenue in one business area, applying a similar method to other areas could increase success in them as well.

4. RESEARCH METHODS AND MATERIAL

In this chapter, empirical research methods and gathered materials will be introduced in more detail. The goal is to provide readers with enough detail and visibility into how the research was done to be able to evaluate its reliability as well as repeat the research if desired (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 255). Basic background on the customer organization is also included. This chapter aims to explain how research questions will be answered through different methods.

The questions will be answered from the sales perspective through interviews and active observation to form an understanding of the current state of information, lead management and especially requirements for development. Since the focus in this thesis is on developing the system to support an also developed process, the current situation will not be analyzed in too much detail. However, familiarity with the current state is important mainly in helping understand what are current strengths and weaknesses, and utilizing these in development.

4.1 Developing the lead management system

According to Homburg et al. (2001, p. 157), the process developing and introducing an information management system consists of six steps. These steps are listed in Figure 19. The same steps or a variation of them can also be used alongside this research to support guideline and system development activities.

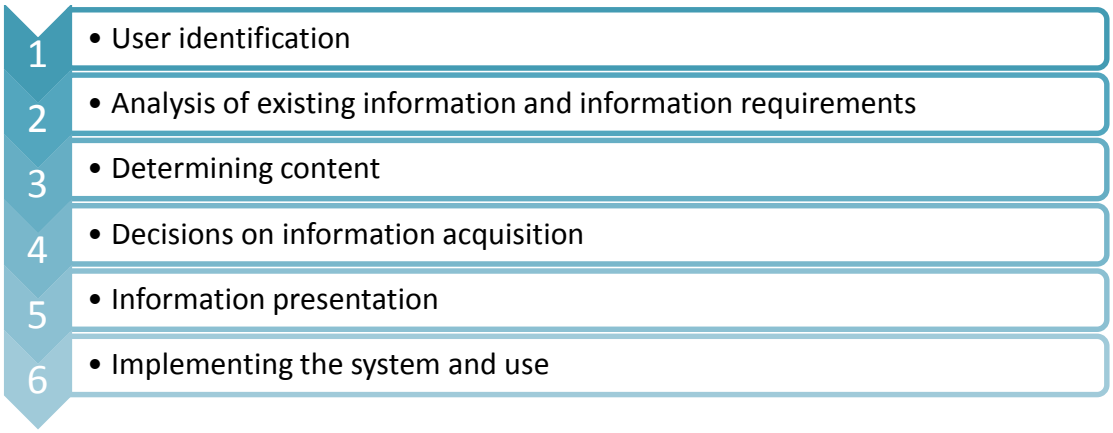


Figure 19. *Developing and introducing an information management system (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 157).*

To start off, the existing and potential users of the system need to be identified. These users will have different types of information needs, depending on, for example, their role in the organization or the market area they work in, which leads to the next step: analyzing existing information and information requirements at different levels. (Homburg et al.

2001, p. 157) Wand & Wang (1996, p. 87) also stress the importance of understanding data quality needs in the system. In this research, existing and potential users of the current web lead management system are identified from within the customer organization. Evaluation of existing information and any other information requirements will be gathered through interviews and observation to achieve a comprehensive understanding of how systematically stored information is used.

Once information needs have been understood, the actual content of the system and how information reaches it should be decided, steps 3 and 4 in Figure 19 (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 158). The content should be based on the information needs of users at different levels – the sales representatives may want details on a certain customer while management may want to have an overview of how well leads are being converted in their area of responsibility. Data that is entered into the system can be either primary or secondary and collected by the company itself or by a third party supplier, depending on the information requirements (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 158). In this research, data into the web lead management system will come mostly directly from the prospect that has entered it via the customer organization's website or from company employees who have entered the lead directly into the database. Data can be enriched with information that is found through collaboration with the prospect. This information can then be combined with possible existing information in the CRM system and information that can be found online to form a holistic outlook of the potential customer.

The final steps in the process are to make decisions about the visual representation of the information and bring the system into use (Homburg et al. 2001, p. 159). Data quality can only be as good as how the end user sees it in the system, so representing the data at the correct level of quality plays an important role in developing the system to support the real-world processes. Ideally, the information system should just be a representation of the real-world system. (Wand & Wang 1996, p. 88) Data often requires standardization to be able to objectively generate a lead score that can be compared to other leads within the same system. Graphical representations and visual reporting can help system users easily identify who they should contact with what priority. (DemandGen Report 2014, p. 11; DemandGen International 2014, p. 5)

In the customer organization, the new Salesforce platform is somewhat familiar to most of the sales organization, and the migrated web lead management system will follow a similar design and function, which should also help with the acceptance of the system. According to Homburg et al. (2001, p. 159), user acceptance is often one of the main challenges when taking a new information system into use, as the system will also pose requirements to the user, such as having to maintain the information and use the system as instructed. In the customer organization, involvement of system users into development as well as training will be the main tools used to help with acceptance, though implementation of the solution is not documented in this thesis.

DemandGen recommends a "3-Phase Lead Scoring Implementation" when implementing a new lead management system and related scoring framework into use in an organization, pictured in Figure 20. Development of the lead qualification model includes researching which lead characteristics give the most value to leads in the company in question. This can typically be done by evaluating and standardizing data in historical leads to help recognize patterns related to successful lead conversion. Eventually an ideal customer profile is developed to guide ideal lead identification. (DemandGen Report 2014, pp. 12-13)

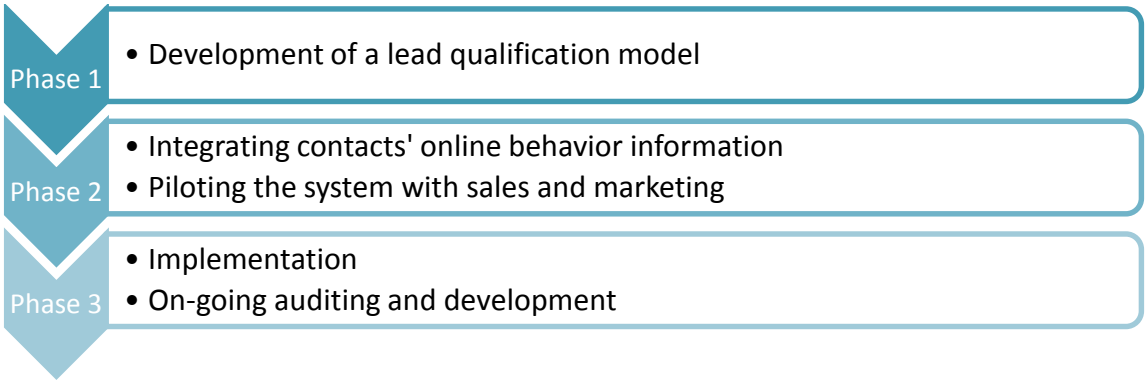


Figure 20. *3-Phase Lead Scoring Implementation (DemandGen Report 2014).*

While lead management system development is often marketing-based, sales should also be involved in the pilot to validate their acceptance of the system. There is often a defined service level for sales, indicating the timeframe in which they should react to a lead assigned to them. The system should support its users so that such reactions are possible in the assigned timeframe, and the developed scoring model should be accurate. The system can also help track leads, assign follow-up tasks for both sales and marketing, and track KPIs. (DemandGen Report 2014, pp. 11-12) The processes described in Figure 19 and Figure 20 are used to help guide development of the system also after the completion of this thesis. They can also help plan the implementation of new functionality into the information system.

4.2 Customer organization

The customer organization of this thesis is Metso Corporation, a global business-to-business company that aims to support their customers in the urbanization of community infrastructure. This means providing products and services to customers in their core industries of mining, oil & gas and aggregates. Metso has about 16000 employees working in over 50 countries, with a vision of "Working as One to be Number One". Currently strategic focus in the company is on growth in the services business, strengthening their position in the minerals processing business and becoming a market leader in flow control. One of the main ways these will be achieved is through developing an even stronger customer focus. (Metso.com 2015)

Metso's sales organization consists of about 2000 employees and is structured on the high level according to business and market areas. To develop customer focus, a new Metso level sales process has been developed and the cloud-based Salesforce tool is being implemented to support the new sales process. The new sales process is divided into five main stages, as pictured in Figure 21.

Figure 21. *New Metso level sales process.*

The CRM program responsible for implementing this process and tool has so far been mainly focused on account, opportunity and pipeline management. Other projects, such as the new Metso website project, are involved in developing lead generation capabilities. In this thesis, the goal is to develop guidelines that will ensure generated leads can be systematically qualified in the new CRM system and handed over to the sales organization and its pipeline in a productive manner.

Each sales process stage includes a checklist of requirements, based on which sales reps are encouraged to move forward to the next stage. For example, when identifying an opportunity, sales reps need to confirm the customer's industry is strategically important and that they have identified a key contact for the sale, before moving forward to developing the sales case and influencing the customer buying decision. The requirements should generate data needs for lead generation – what needs to be known about the lead to be able to identify its potential value.

The customer organization for this thesis currently manages their sales leads in a legacy platform based database application. Since the platform is being ramped down, lead management will inevitably move to a new system, Salesforce, in the near future. This thesis will propose guidelines for development and configuration of the lead management functionality in Salesforce.

4.3 Data collection methods

Research for this thesis will be conducted in several different methods and from as many stakeholders as is considered relevant. Due to limitations of resources, only a sample group will participate in the study, instead of the entire group that it is related to. Sampling makes detailed data collection possible, while also leaving more time for evaluating the accuracy of collected data (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 212). Though the goal of this research is to provide the whole group with a solution, it is not practical to define each group

member's requirements individually. Instead, representative samples will be chosen non-randomly using a combination of quota sampling and purposive sampling.

Quota sampling means dividing the entire group into several, more defined groups (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 235). In this case, the "entire group" is represented by Metso's sales and marketing organizations. Sub-groups could be divided in many different ways, such as by business area, market area or organizational hierarchy. It is important to note that a market area head from the Flow Control business area in Europe may have entirely different requirements for lead management than a sales engineer from the Minerals business area in South America. The defined solution, however, should be adaptable to both parties' needs.

Purposive sampling means selecting cases based on the estimate of their ability to help in answering the research question and meeting research objectives (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 237). The main objective of empirical research is to solve how sales leads can be successfully managed. Participants therefore need to have some experience handling leads and the ability to identify how their work with lead management could be better supported. The steering team for this thesis helped select suitable candidates for interviews.

For this thesis, the sample size is not defined specifically yet when empirical research is being designed. Instead, data is collected until a satisfactory data saturation level is reached, meaning that significant new information is no longer obtained (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 177; Saunders et al. 2009, p. 235). For example, topics brought to light in interviews will start repeating from session to session, and eventually no new topics to the research will arise. At this point, it is considered that enough relevant data has been collected to be able to draw results from. On the other hand, there is also enough data to be able to recognize trends and the most significant findings. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 177) While trends started to become apparent and information began to saturate, the number of interviews conducted was also limited by the timeframe they were to be conducted in as well as the number of candidates that responded to the interview requests.

The primary empirical research methods chosen to be used in this thesis are semi-structured interviews and participant observation. In the following sections, their use is described in more detail. Additionally, open discussion were held with the examiner, instructor and members of Metso's CMO team when work on the thesis was started to help define objectives and scope. These discussions can be considered unstructured interviews, where questions were not predefined but the topic was explored to direct towards the correct focus for the thesis (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 321). Different biases and potential errors in data were carefully considered for each method when conducting the research.

4.3.1 Interviews

Interviews have been selected as the main data collection method for this thesis. Interviews are conducted as one-to-one qualitative interviews. Qualitative interviews are considered best suitable to be used in cases where it is important for the researcher to understand reasoning behind the respondents' answers (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 200; Saunders et al. 2009, p. 324). This is consistent with the research philosophy of interpretivism, which has been chosen for this thesis. Being able to ask for specification on answers helps form a mutual understanding between the interviewer and respondent, and gives more depth and quality to the collected data (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 200; Saunders et al. 2009, p. 324).

Interviews for this thesis were designed to be semi-structured. This gives the interviewer better flexibility in clarifying answers to open-ended questions and varying when and how questions are asked per interview (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 200; Saunders et al. 2009, p. 324). At the same time, it is important for the interviewer to keep track that the same frame of questions is still being asked from each respondent, so that research questions can be answered. The interviewer aims to gather information that is as reliable and valid as possible, keeping in mind the goals of the research (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 203). Interviews were recorded where permission was given and transcribed for further analysis.

Interviews in the customer organization were conducted during May, June and July 2015. The interview outline can be found in Appendix A of this paper. The interview outline consisted of the following main themes:

- lead management process and successful lead management
- roles in lead management (information systems, processes, organization)
- data and information in leads and their quality
- lead management analytics

The main themes of the interview were based on research questions, and the details discussed were based on theoretical findings from literature as well as discussions with the steering team of the thesis. The interview outline was tailored slightly for some interviews from that presented in Appendix A. The goal was to gain insight from different perspectives depending on the respondent's role related to lead management, still presenting the same critical questions to each participant.

To find what participants considered successful lead management, questions were asked about the current process and systems and how they could be improved upon. Also the key elements of a successful lead case were considered something that would be important to identify. As part of the process, also the role of the interview participant as well as other roles they saw as part of lead management were discussed. Since this thesis has

a systematic focus, the role of the information system and its usefulness in lead management was asked about.

To solve what role data and information play in leads, different data and information elements were listed to interview participants, and they shared their thoughts on whether it was important to know, at what phase in lead management, and why. The quality and usability of the information provided was also discussed as part of solving information requirements participants have related to leads. Based on information requirements, also possibilities of what kinds of analysis and automation could support lead management were solved.

Initial interview candidates were nominated by the CMO team. The goal was to form a holistic view of lead management at Metso, so persons from different countries and business areas were interviewed. People with different competences related to lead management were interviewed to be able to understand the work from different stakeholders' perspectives. Specific requirements from marketing were not gathered in the scope of this thesis, as the goal is mainly to develop a solution to meet the needs of sales. This means the solution may propose recommendations for information gathered during lead generation, conducted often by marketing, but does not directly take into account what requirements marketing may have from sales or other departments. Views from marketing management were taken into account through interviews.

Based on recommendations of who to interview, requests were emailed to candidates, including brief information on the ongoing thesis work and research objectives. Since interview participants were in different locations in Finland and globally, most interviews were conducted as online calls with possible desktop sharing. Sharing one's desktop allowed for easier demonstration of activities, especially related to existing systems and other tools. Thanks to recording capabilities, the shared demonstrations were possible to store for later reference, observation and analysis along with verbal recordings of the interviews.

After initial agreement to participate in the research, interview times were agreed. It was estimated that interviews would usually last at most about 1,5 hours. Participants were sent another email with a more detailed outline of discussion topics as well as conventions related to the actual interview. At this point, they were initially asked if the interview can be recorded for research purposes, including recording of both the verbal discussion and possible desktop demonstration, and informed that any information they give will be kept anonymous. The use of the data for the research was reviewed. Any questions or concerns presented by the interview participants were addressed.

At the beginning of each interview, consent was again asked to record the session. Participants were told they could ask to end the recording at any point and choose not to answer any questions they wished not to. The anonymity of the collected data was also

confirmed and any participant questions addressed. Through these conventions, it was ensured that all participants were thoroughly informed and consenting of the purposes of the research and research methods, and that they were not being manipulated into participating or during participation (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 25).

Despite having informed consent from the interview participants and guaranteeing their anonymity, interviews still face a number of validity challenges. Responses may be informative but not always on topic, and the researcher may not always know in what way their questions are interpreted. The participant may also feel the interview situation is somehow unsecure, and therefore respond in a certain way. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, pp. 200-201) Especially in this research, where most interviews were not conducted face-to-face, there is a risk that not enough trust was formed between the interviewer and participant, or that a mutual understanding was not found, since it was often not possible to read any body language.

Table 4 summarizes details about the interviews. Interview participants are numbered and will be referenced based on these numbers later on in results. All interviews were semi-structured. Questions were asked by the researcher throughout the discussion based on the defined interview outline to help fill in information about the process, focusing on the objectives and information needs of the research. Though interview requests were sent out to sales managers, sales representatives and marketing coordinators, it was interesting to note that management was more responsive to the requests and therefore the focus of the interviews was also shifted more towards a management perspective.

Table 4. *Interview participants in the customer organization.*

#	Role	Business area and location	Time (hours)	Date	Type
1	Digital Marketing Manager	CMO, Finland	1,5	May 28, 2015	online
2	SVP, Customer and Marketing Operations	CMO, Finland	0,5	June 26, 2015	online
3	VP, Sales & Process Development	Metal Recycling (Minerals), USA	1	July 7, 2015	face-to-face
4	Senior Sales Manager	Flow Control, Korea	0,75	July 8, 2015	online
5	Director, Finland Sales	Minerals, Finland	1,5	July 15, 2015	face-to-face

At the end of each interview, participants were thanked. They were asked to contact the researcher in case they came up with any additional thoughts, comments or questions later on that they would like to add to the discussion. Once each interview had been transcribed, a brief summary of the discussed topics was sent to the participant for review as well as another "thank you" for participating in the research. A summary of the results of the thesis was also eventually sent out and a presentation given where all interview participants were invited to attend.

Since the number of interviews conducted for this thesis was eventually relatively small, concerns about the generalizability of the qualitative findings may arise. However, Bryman (1989, according to Saunders et al. 2009, p. 335) states that often one case can actually consist of several examples and activities, and especially when the empirical findings are supported by findings in other literature, the sample size becomes less significant. In this research, interview participants often based their answers on a number of lead cases and examples they had been a part of or heard of, meaning the actual amount of sales inquiries and other leads analyzed was actually much greater than the number of interviews conducted.

Concerns about the validity and reliability of interview results may also arise. In qualitative research, there is always room for interpretations from all stakeholders, such as the researcher, participants and the reader. To help ensure validity and reliability, justification should be given for the choices made and results found during the research and analysis process. Additionally, using a combination of methods helps confirm the results given by one method. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, pp. 227-228)

4.3.2 Observation

Observation in research is used to systematically recording, describing and interpreting behavior based on what is observed (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 288). It is useful especially for studying interaction (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 208), such as should happen between a sales representative and customer at some point in handling a sales inquiry. Observation in this research will be used mainly as a form of getting familiar with existing systems, data, process maps and other possible materials and methods related to lead management.

The purpose of observation in this case is not to take part in the activities to be executed, but more to gain an understanding of them from a spectator's point of view. In cases where other participants know the purpose and identity of the researcher, the researcher has taken on the role of observer as participant. In cases where the identity and purpose is not revealed, the researcher is considered a complete observer. (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 294) In this thesis, both methods will be used in different situations. The different roles a researcher can take in observation have been implied in Figure 22.

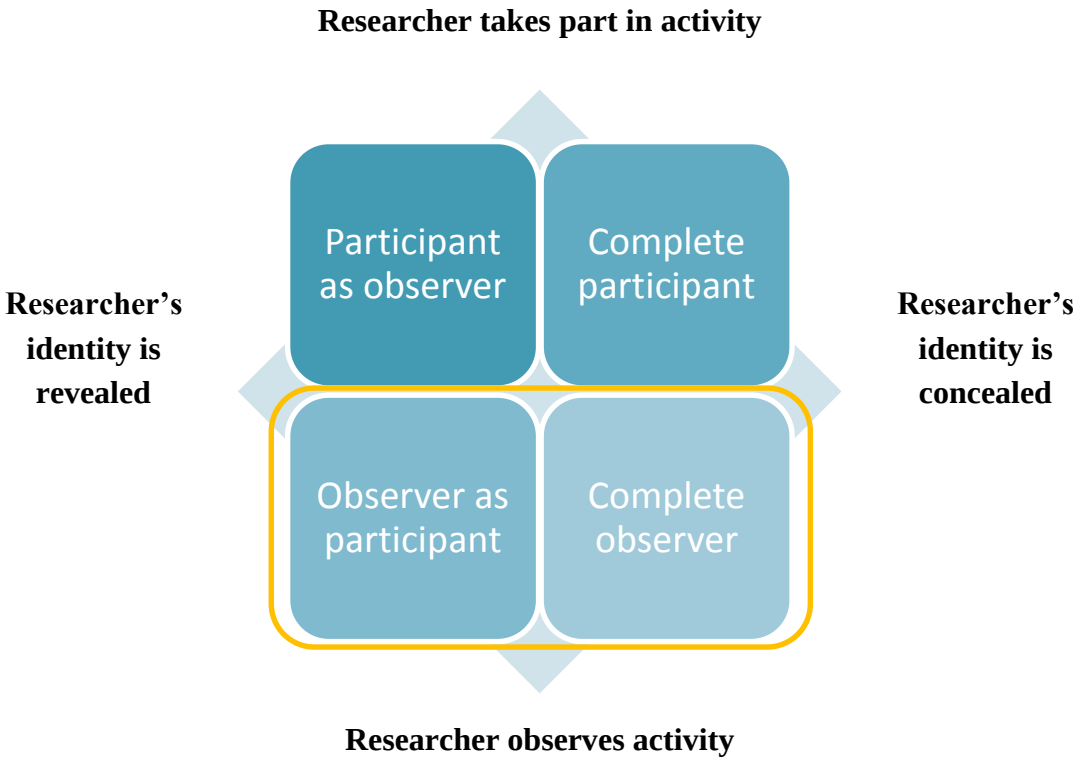


Figure 22. *Researcher roles in observation (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 293).*

Where the researcher takes on the role of observer as participant, informal discussion between the observer and other participants will take place to help develop a mutual understanding of the topic. With the help of this observation and discussion, a description of activities and related key persons will be written out on the current flow of lead management in the customer organization. (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 296) Where possible, observation sessions related to current lead management are conducted with select persons who also participate in interviews. This will give the researcher an opportunity to further clarify interview findings and understand the interviewee's answers. To ensure validity of the observations, informant verification will be used. This means the written out summaries of observation will be sent to the informants so they can validate that the content is correct (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 298).

Participant observation gives the researcher an opportunity to see how participants act in an actual lead handling situation instead of only hearing their description of it in an interview. Any contradictions in what is said in one situation and demonstrated in another can be recognized here. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 207) Seeing how the work is done instead of just hearing about it is expected to also contribute to the usability of the proposed solution. Though, especially in the case where the researcher takes on the role of observer as participant, there is a risk that the participant will act differently than they would without the researcher present (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 208).

Since the interview sessions were eventually conducted mostly with sales management instead of any sales representatives or marketing coordinators, demonstration of work

how it is done in different tools was only given by the digital marketing manager, who also participated in steering for the thesis. The process and tool were thoroughly described and supported by other materials, so it was not seen necessary to seek another demonstration. Instead, observation was focused on observing data in the existing database as well as its sources, the forms used to enter it. A challenge that was identified early on in interviews, however, was that with existing tools, it has not been possible to systematically identify which leads have converted into opportunities and sales.

Monat (2011, p. 188) recommends collecting historical lead data and evaluating their information variables to formulate a score. The researcher will observe and analyze data from this database as a complete observer, where not all persons mentioned and involved in the database will be made aware of the ongoing research. In addition to qualitative interpretation of the information in the database, some quantitative data can be obtained. The leads, however, may not be as complete with information as if they had been gathered and entered using a defined framework (Monat 2011, p. 190). By scoring these historical leads, developed lead qualification methods could be tested for accuracy. However in this case, where data about conversion rates of leads into opportunities and sales is not available, it was not possible to execute.

Though the data observed could also have been used for structured observation, participant observation was chosen as more suitable to the research philosophy of interpretivism. Structured observation often aims to answer to how often things happen rather than why they happen, which is the purpose of participant observation (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 300). While seeing how often sales inquiries enter the database may be an interesting part of the lead management process, it is not part of the focus of this thesis.

4.4 Analysis methods

Before collected data can be analyzed, it needs to be prepared into a suitable format for analysis. Interviews will be transcribed. Analysis will be continuous alongside data collection, especially during interviews. This allows for themes that have come up in previous interviews to be investigated in future interviews as well as gives the possibility of adjusting interview questions that are not generating answers that are relevant to the research. In inductive data analysis, such as is used in this thesis, recognizing themes while data collection is still ongoing is important for guiding work forward. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, pp. 217-218; Saunders et al. 2009, pp. 487-490)

Validity of the gathered data also needs to be checked and analyzed. When going through the data, any errors and deficiencies are identified and possible corrective actions taken to help fulfill answers. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, pp. 216-217) Once data is prepared, systematic analysis will follow a combination of summarizing and categorizing collected data, to be able to inductively develop guidelines. Summarizing helps find common themes already during the data collection phase. Based on these themes, categories are developed

and data is linked to them meaningfully. Eventually relationships and units of data become apparent and the collected data set becomes more structured. (Saunders et al. 2009, pp. 490-496) With the help of this more structured data, syntheses can be formed around the research questions (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 225).

According to Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2004), inductive analysis can be divided into three main phases: reduction, clustering and abstraction. In the reduction phase, main themes and topics are extracted from the full material. These topics and themes are further clustered and grouped to form a logical classification of the data. During abstraction, data most relevant to the research is selected from the full material and a new framework can be formed and compared to existing theory. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2004) These phases correspond with those Saunders et al. (2009) also explained. Classifying and coding the data helps simplify it into a form that is easier to analyze and find causal relationships in, creating a synthesis of the material (Miles & Huberman 1994, p. 69). Analysis in this research is done fully inductively, so themes and codes were not pre-defined.

For this research, analysis is done manually from transcribed interviews and data collected during observation. A total of 26 pages of transcribed interviews and a sample of 41 database leads were analyzed. The analysis of existing lead management cases helps find what kind of information or traits are typically linked to quality leads and existing customers (DemandGen Report 2014, p. 5). Web and database forms for entering leads were also observed and analyzed alongside the data and information systems. Once results of the research become apparent, they can be interpreted and conclusions drawn based on both theoretical and empirical sources. It is important to identify how different stakeholders, such as the researcher, participants and readers, all may interpret the research differently, due to different perceptions (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 224).

To ensure correctness of interview content and that a mutual understanding was formed between the interviewer and participant, summaries were sent out to each participant with the main points of the discussion. Though some level of analysis was ongoing throughout interviews, actual material analysis was started by reducing the data into simple statements. While going through transcribed interviews, statements were selected based on their relevancy to research questions, to keep focus on the research objectives. Statements were linked directly to a research question when simplified, to ensure they were applicable. This helped eliminate parts of the discussion that were more off-topic from the data to be analyzed.

Once statements were gathered into a table, their clustering and classification was started. Interviews concentrated on solving the research questions of "What are the requirements for successfully managing leads?", "What kinds of roles and responsibilities do people and information systems have in the lead management process?" and "What kinds of data and information are tied to leads?". The remaining research questions were discussed to

some level, but were not focused on, as they were the main areas that findings and recommendations based on literature could aim to improve.

The final requirements and their sub-categories can be seen in Figure 23. Data has been classified under the categories of Successful lead management, Roles, Data and information and Lead quality and analysis. These were each divided further into five to seven sub-categories to better describe each class.

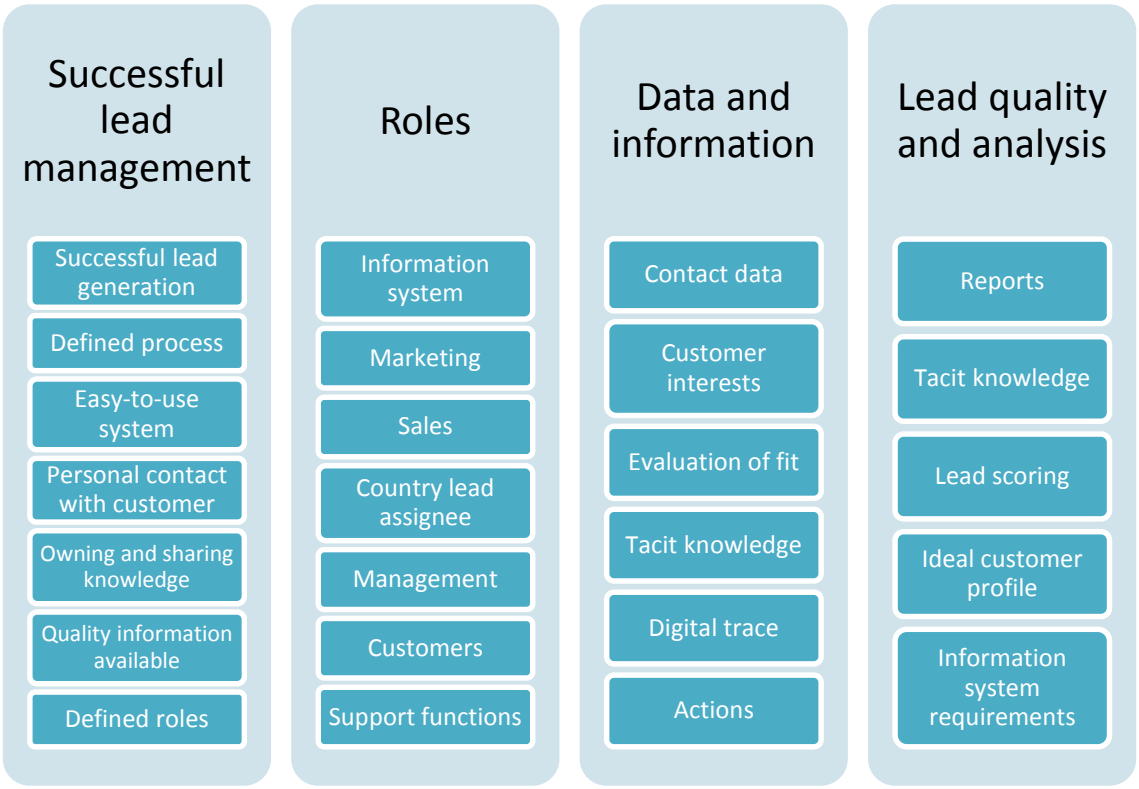


Figure 23. *Classification of interview data.*

Data observed from the existing lead database was also analyzed. A sample of 19 processed leads and 22 disqualified sales inquiries was selected to analyze especially how they support interview findings related to requirements. The leads were dated between April and July 2015. Observation was focused on verifying statements from interviews, as the main goal of using several research methods is to ensure validity. Findings from data observation are also explored in chapter 5 along with interview findings.

5. RESULTS

In this chapter, findings from empirical research and analysis are described. Analysis was done by linking statements directly to research questions by theme. The themes were then analyzed further to help answer each research question. For example, when identifying roles in the lead management process, each statement was classified based on what role it was related to. While reading results, it is important to note that the interview outline was slightly modified per participant depending on their role. This means that while some statements came up only in certain interviews, it may not have been discussed to the same extent in all interviews.

Since interviews were done mostly in Finnish as it was the native language for both the researcher and most participants, citations included in this chapter have been translated and modified slightly so that they can be more easily understood. While there is a risk that something may have been lost in translation, the aim was to translate the comments as unambiguously as possible.

5.1 Requirements for successful lead management

To solve the research question "What are the requirements for successfully managing leads?", interview participants were asked about the processes and tools they use when working with leads, as well as the strengths, weaknesses and challenges that come up along the way. Characteristics of typically successful and unsuccessful sales cases were also a topic. From a theoretical perspective, requirements for successful lead management were explored throughout chapters 2 and 3.

To generate and gather leads in the first place, marketing needs to be able to successfully run campaigns. For web leads, the goal is to build a path that leads to prospects leaving their contact information as the result of a campaign. Marketing automation is starting to be used for this, but is not yet widely familiar at Metso. The possibility of marketing automation was discussed in three of the interviews, with people who had some role in marketing. For example, participant 3 recently participated in running a campaign where lead management functionality in Salesforce was piloted. While leads were generated in the campaign, they came mostly through emails instead of the web form that was built.

> *Participant 3: "We did it in a little bit of a hurry and didn't put enough effort into the content, so that we would really have hooked the customer onto leaving their contact information [online]… While we didn't get the results we wanted, campaigning online is a cost-efficient way to reach large masses, and we should definitely do more of it."*

The existing lead management process as it is seen from the system perspective is depicted in Figure 24. The statuses New, No Action, Delegated, Answered and Processed are assigned automatically based on the actions a user can take in the system. For example, if someone decides to answer to the inquiry, they can do it directly from the system and the inquiry will move to status Answered. Figure 24 is the result of observing the existing lead management database's functionality and adding the main identified roles from interviews. Participant 1 demonstrated the full process and system use, and the system was also available for the researcher to observe independently. Other demonstrations were not seen as necessary, as the system functionality could be understood unambiguously based on one demo. Which functionalities are typically used by either sales or marketing have also been included in the depiction based on the demonstration as well as other interview discussions. It was discussed that marketing often initially checks and validates the leads legitimacy while sales answers to them and processes them.

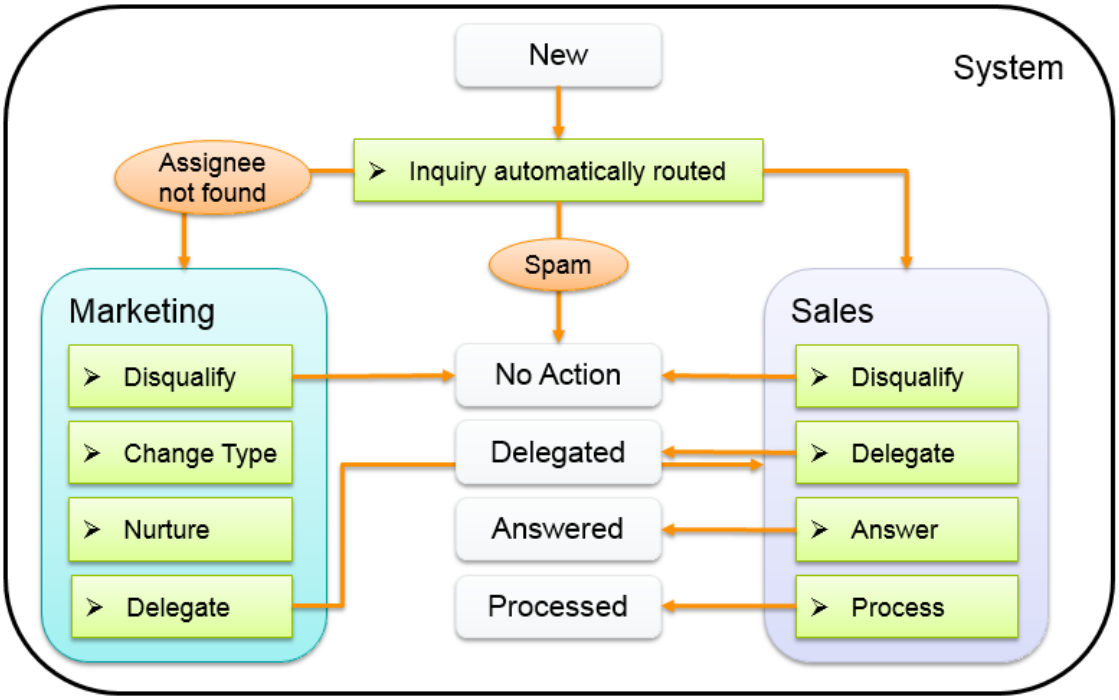


Figure 24. *Lead management process in the existing Metso system.*

Currently new leads are automatically routed by the system based on the geographical location and business area indicated in the inquiry, and can be assigned to one or more persons. If the system is not automatically able to identify which salesperson the lead should be routed to, it is sent to a marketing back-up for validation. Often information required to route the lead may be missing or data is incomplete. The lead is delegated to sales for handling, and usually once the quotation is sent, the lead is marked as processed and it moves from the lead handling process into the sales process. For the most part, the sales process stages are managed through Salesforce CRM.

While the system supports and guides work, sales must successfully communicate with the prospect from an early stage. This, ultimately, helps win the case, since Metso representatives are able to influence the prospect and their thinking, and also find which customers would best suit Metso. This was mentioned in almost all interviews when participants were asked what an ideal lead or customer would be like.

Timeliness in responding to leads in general was considered important, comparing to participant's own experiences when sending out inquiries. Usually a rather quick answer is expected. Handling times are something to be tracked, to be able to manage that they are satisfactory. The following citations show how typical it was for interview participants to bring up the importance of personal contact early on in the lead handling process, even though nothing was specifically asked about it. Without contact and a successful relationship, it was considered unlikely that the case could be won.

> *Participant 2: "The earlier on we have people participating in developing the lead, the more likely it is that specifications and the customer's thoughts fit Metso, and we are also more likely to get the sale."*

> *Participant 3: "There needs to be a person participating in the customer's path quite early on."*

> *Participant 4: "There needs to be human contact to be able to develop the customer relationship right away."*

Sharing information came up in several interviews as a vital part of successful lead management. Metso is able to provide full process support for the customer, and solution development is often most successful when enough information is given by the prospect. This requires knowledge and good customer relationship management skills from sales representatives. Even if cases are lost, contact with the customer should be continued to help with possible future cases. The next citation summarizes some of the competence and skills sales representatives need when working with customers.

> *Participant 4: "Sales guys need to know products well, be able to solve customer needs, know competitors and be able to identify if there is an opportunity."*

Sales has a lot of knowledge about leads and customers that may not always be systematically documented. One participant shared how new leads are gone through together with the team on a regular basis, but what information about, for example, customer visits is recorded into the system is not fully standardized. Some may use the system to write up meeting details and upload attachments, while others may only indicate that the customer was contacted. Attachments are often technical specifications or proposals.

Along with the system demonstration, it came up that when delegating leads to others, some like to write comments, for example, if the lead has already been contacted. Actions

taken with the lead are usually visible also in the history log, helping track what actions have been taken. Being able to follow how collaborative Metso has been with the customer as well as the customer's satisfaction with actions should be possible to track.

To better support work, two of the participants specifically brought up that the information system should include all functions related to customer relationship management. However, the current opportunity management system is considered too heavy to use by them and their teams. The user interface and usability could also be improved. These interview participants had been using the Salesforce system for some time for their opportunity and account management activities.

It was agreed by most participants that the information system needs to be able to provide complete data, so that it can be trusted. The availability of the system and its information anywhere supports work, and having information openly available within the system is also important for internal benchmarking. For example, one participant was in a new role that involved some marketing management, and wanted to get more information about how marketing campaigns had been successfully run elsewhere in the company. Information integrated from other systems supports the information managed within the system. However, updating information is often considered too difficult. This was again brought up by the participants that had been directly using the system for opportunity and account management.

While growth is an indication of success, growth may not be achieved directly even if lead management becomes more successful and sales cases start more proactively. Currently it is not possible to directly measure the success of campaigns and lead generation, but future plans are in gathering and utilizing this information, as was found especially in discussions with participant 2. It would be used for finding successful ways to execute campaigns and find leads.

> *Participant 2: "One day, when a campaign has been launched, we will be able to measure how many new contacts we gained, how many orders, how large the investments were, then it becomes very clear that ok, we've spent 300 thousand euros and gained orders that value 3 million."*

Defining roles internally and finding the correct people at the prospect to work with are also a success factor in lead management, as brought up in almost all interviews. The actual roles related to lead management are discussed further in chapter 5.2. The key requirements that can be considered success factors in lead management have been collected into Figure 25 based on the interview topics discussed in this chapter. There were the areas that were brought up in several interviews as a relevant part of lead management in general as well as success cases.

Figure 25. *Requirements for successful lead management.*

Marketing efforts support lead generation and the amount of leads coming in in the first place can depend on their success. Both the process and system support sales' work in lead management, however, personal contact and knowledge about customer relationship management in general help win each case. Part of the process and, on the other hand, also customer relationship management, is the ability to clearly define roles both internally at Metso and at the customer, so the correct people can collaborate to find the best possible solution. This sets requirements for information to be of good quality, and the information system to be easy to use, so that it can be used most effectively.

5.2 Roles in lead management

To solve the research question "What kinds of roles and responsibilities do people and information systems have in the lead management process?", interview participants were asked about their role and other roles in the lead management process. Also the roles of people marked as "Metso responsible" on existing database leads were solved for reference. From a theoretical perspective, different roles in lead management were explored in chapter 2.3. The role of the information system as part of the process was also discussed. The significance of solving these roles was even brought up in an interview:

> *Participant 1: "There are clear roles at the customer who is responsible for what and also we at Metso need to know who is responsible for what."*

Marketing is more involved in initially qualifying leads than handling them later in the process. At Metso, a lead is considered marketing qualified if the information in it is seen

as valid – usually it's enough that all required fields have been filled out and the inquiring company seems legitimate. This was brought up in several interviews. According to one participant, any further qualification and nurturing of the lead is left up to sales in smaller business areas, while in larger business areas a person or team may be responsible for nurturing the lead before assigning it to a sales representative. According to another participant, most all leads are acted upon and nurtured in any case by sales, and an estimate of 90% of cases can be quoted.

> *Participant 3: "In practice we need some kind of lead validation, but with our volumes, validation in centralized functions is just checking that it's not Donald Duck or something like that, but that it looks like a valid contact. Follow-up and confirming the lead in our organization would be up to sales guys. We are a smaller organization and don't have marketing teams around the world, so roles build up a little differently than in larger business lines and business areas, where marketing could probably validate the lead further even before sending it to sales."*

While marketing usually does not handle leads, they may have a role in managing that they are followed up on in a timely manner. They can do this, for example, by daily checking up on which leads have been pending for longer than is considered acceptable. Information about these leads is gathered into one message and sent out to all assignees. There have been discussions to automate sending the reminder, but so far it has been considered better that there is a person checking the leads that reminders are being sent about, in case there is a good reason they have not been handled yet. This was shared by participant 1, who demonstrated the use of the tool. A few others also mentioned that not everything should be automated, because human knowledge is quite valuable.

During the demonstration it was shared how the assignees can respond to the reminder email with an estimate of the lead's value, but it is not required. This is the only time the lead's value is estimated while it is still a lead, and has not yet been converted into an opportunity. It is based solely on the sales representative's subjective experience, but some work has been done so that the typical value of a sales case could be estimated. This is also currently the main way marketing is able to get information about the potential of the leads that have come in through the online inquiry form.

One interview participant told how information about a recent marketing campaign was communicated over to sales, so they knew what kinds of leads to expect. Another participant, however, mentioned this kind of information may not be necessary, since the volumes of leads are not so high that sales would need to specifically be more prepared when campaigns are run. Part of the role of marketing is to run campaigns to generate leads and they can also use different tools to digitally qualify prospects. Participant 2 shared that this is part of marketing automation that is being incorporated into tools also at Metso.

> *Participant 2: "With marketing campaigns we aim to reach both existing and new customers, and qualify the leads in a digital environment with the customers. We ask them to register, invite them to webinars, and when we get a positive response to all of these, we know the lead is something worth pursuing by sales."*

Based on interviews, most leads at Metso are initiated through campaigns or by the prospects or existing customers themselves. Jolson & Wotruba (1992) classify these as non-effort leads from the sales perspective. Ross & Tyler (2012) emphasized the value in finding leads from existing customers, which is done systematically at Metso, for example, through service lead identification. Participant 3 shared how service engineers identify leads through their visits at customer sites. The target is that each service engineer identifies at least five leads per month, which the service manager is responsible for documenting and forwarding the information to sales. The sales organization then goes through the leads and creates them as opportunities in the Salesforce system.

Leads coming directly from existing customers are considered to be more valid right away. Customers also play an important part in sharing information internally in their organizations. In this sense, existing customers can also be seen as having an important role in lead management. The roles within the customer's organization are especially important – the champion is the person who is usually willing to share information and influencers can help make the decision of whether or not to make a purchase.

> *Participant 1: "For a company selling large investment commodities like Metso, the customer's buying process is never a one man show. The more information the contact shares with their network, the more commitment we get for the solution being sold."*

> *Participant 5: "Leads that come through the web form tend to be more random queries, but the best leads usually come by phone or through customer visits. Phishing attempts also often come through web leads … and we need to be careful not to cause competition between sales offices."*

Once leads have been generated, they enter through a number of sources. In this thesis, the scope was restricted to focus on leads that were in the inquiry handling database and usually came through the web inquiry form. In existing leads, the person marked as responsible for the lead in the database is often a sales engineer, sales manager, sales director, country manager, account manager or product manager. This is in line with interviews, where it was discussed that usually someone from sales will handle and process the lead.

Often the system has however first assigned the lead to a named person per country, who is usually someone from sales, marketing or an administrative assistant. In some countries, the notification may be sent to an inbox that is monitored by more than one person. There is a defined list for each country who the lead should be assigned to first, and this

first assignment step is automated. If the system is not able to assign the lead based on rules, it is assigned to a marketing back-up person. If the first assignee of the lead is not the correct person to respond to the inquiry, they will delegate it onward to someone with more knowledge about the product or topic inquired about. The delegation flow of leads was discussed during the demonstration with participant 1, but also with other participants along with the roles of people in the lead management process and related to the responsibilities and knowledge they have.

> *Participant 5: "The filter person needs good lists to be able to assign the lead correctly, otherwise they all come to me. But it's not a problem if they do, there aren't that many that it would be a problem, but I would imagine in larger market areas it would be more important."*

Before the lead is assigned onward, some validation is done to make sure it is a legitimate contact. Understanding lead legitimacy can require some tacit knowledge or a "trained eye", but at least the existence of a company can often be solved with the help of an online search engine. Within the company, it is, however, important to know who the best person to follow up on the lead is. This puts the country assignee in a key role to know who are responsible for product lines and services, as they need to be able to nurture and assign the leads onwards based on information in the lead. Usually lists can and have been devised to guide who the lead should be assigned to, but tacit knowledge also plays a role in handling the leads. The importance of the role of the country assignee came up in three out of the five interviews.

> *Participant 5: "Even with the lists and intellect in the system, assigning leads requires some tacit knowledge. Fully automating it wouldn't probably be possible or for the best, there needs to be a person doing some validation. And the work is so valuable, that doing it well pays back fairly quickly."*

Outside of the system, sales collaborates with both the prospect and product experts as needed. Sharing implicit knowledge between team members per case helps find the best solution for the customer, and roles should be clearly defined. One participant shared that communicating especially with product support and production is beneficial in being able to make a realistic offer to the customer along with expertise about the product. Several others also mentioned how much knowledge Metso employees have that is needed to support building customer cases. In the case of inquiries that come in through the website, the sales responsible contacts the prospect for more information as needed to be able to respond to their inquiry, for example, with a quotation. Sales uses their experiences as a base for working with different types of leads and customers.

Three out of the five interview participants for this thesis were in a sales management role, one of whom also had some responsibility over their business line's marketing management. The people in this role participate in both actively generating leads as well as

turning them into sales. Working with their team and other people within the organization was also seen as an important part of the role. Knowing who to contact for more information, for example, about certain products helps build a relevant proposal for the customer. It is beneficial to be able to support in providing and finding information sales may need. All in all, selling is based highly on teamwork.

Top management plays a role in supporting the strategic initiatives, and the development of lead generation activities and marketing automation have been on the table recently. Competence development is part of ensuring sales has the skill to work more proactively with leads. Training is often initiated by management and communication goes both ways, so that management also understands what are the core competences of the company's people and what kinds of projects they could be involved in in the future. This was discussed especially with participant 2, who is the Senior Vice President of Customer and Marketing Operations, and therefore in part responsible for developing sales competence.

> *Participant 2: "We have a fairly good understanding in the executive team that these things are important. If we have concrete plans that have a positive effect on them, resources are prioritized based on that."*

The role of the information system is often seen as an enabler for systematic ways of working. It is needed to record information, share information and find information that is needed. The requirements for the system are seen as being fairly simple. Information should be in one place and there should be end-to-end visibility on how leads enter and what happens to them from then on. All interview participants considered it important that all activities related to sales could be seen from one system, and especially that there would also be visibility on which leads actually convert to opportunities and sales. Currently this is not possible to easily determine.

> *Participant 4: "Salesforce enables systematic sales management - clear definition for target and potential business, target and goal reminders, valuable reports and a simple way to give sales meeting and manger's feedback."*

> *Participant 5: "It's good that we have an information system, as it makes work more systematic, and it becomes easier to concentrate on what is most relevant."*

If there are more leads coming into than currently, marketing automation as part of the system was seen as more valuable than it would be now. For marketing automation to have more value, more data in general would be needed in the system. Being more data-driven and collaborative could promote learning. Especially since it was felt that there was not enough knowledge yet about campaigning, participant 5 brought up the possibility of creating more learning opportunities within the organization.

Participant 3: "If every business line and market area needs to think about and come up with these things, a lot of learning could be underused. Keeping data open and visible helps utilize it."

To conclude, the main roles and their areas of responsibility related to lead management have been briefly outlined in Figure 26 and Table 5. Figure 26 combines the roles into a linear process, to understand how leads flow in the organization. This includes the role of the information system as well as marketing and sales. The role of the country lead assignee may be either someone from marketing or sales, but their responsibility and significance was seen as high enough to be mentioned here in their own category.

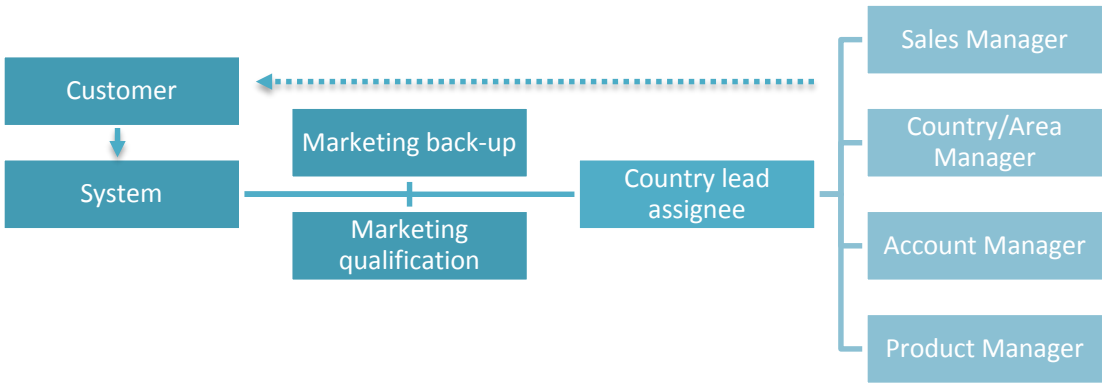


Figure 26. *Process flow of roles in the lead management process.*

While product support and production were also mentioned as supporting roles in the process, communication with them is led by the sales representative responsible for the case. Therefore, support functions were not seen here as a key role. For the main internal roles in the process in Figure 26, responsibilities of the different roles have been summarized in Table 5. All roles have some responsibility in qualifying the leads and supporting information management related to the lead.

Table 5. *Responsibilities in the lead management process.*

Role	**Responsibilities**
Information system	• Assigns the lead based on rules • Provides and stores information • Enables systematic sales management
Marketing - **campaign teams** - **back-up person**	• Generate leads • Validates leads for legitimacy • Lead qualification • Following that leads are being contacted

Role	Responsibilities
Country lead assignee	• Assigns the lead based on rules and knowledge • Filter out irrelevant leads
Sales manager, Country / Area Manager, Account Manager, Product Manager	• Systematic management • Teamwork • Developing competence

In addition to the roles summarized in Figure 26, there are other roles that participate in lead management at different levels, but are usually not in a key role. They may not be involved in the daily work of lead management, but participate in supporting sales and marketing in their actions. All roles are summarized in Figure 27.

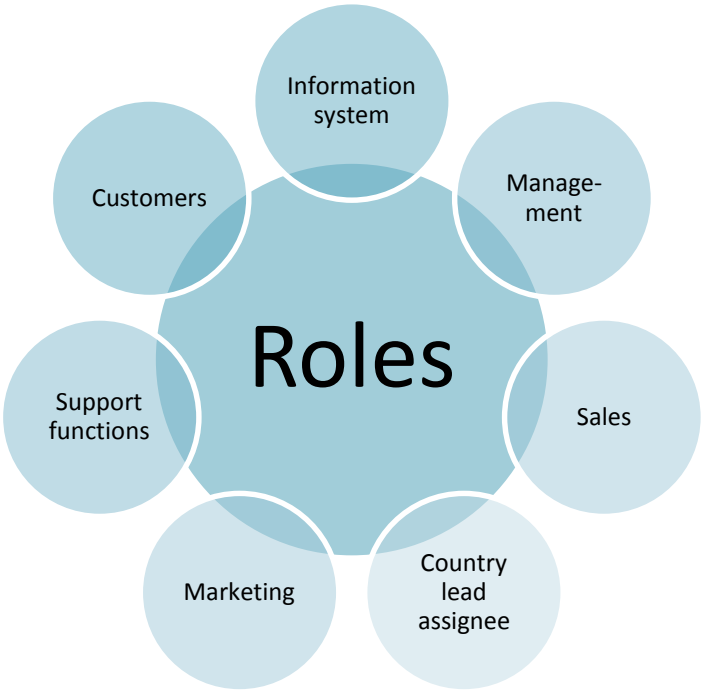


Figure 27. *Roles in the lead management process.*

Top management plays a role in ensuring strategic targets are reached and prioritizes resources based on both existing competence and development needs. Support functions such as product lines provide information to sales as needed. Existing customers and prospects also play a role in lead management, mostly in generating leads and working with the Metso team, giving information needed to provide proposals and develop the customer relationship.

5.3 Data and information in leads

To solve the research question "What kinds of data and information are tied to leads?", interview participants were asked about different data elements that can be linked to leads,

based on those identified in chapter 3.1. The possibility of tacit knowledge required from persons handling leads was also discussed. This was already mentioned to some level along with the roles in lead management in chapter 5.2.

Data requirements for sales inquiries entered through the public company website can be seen in Figure 28. Leads can also be submitted internally, using the existing web lead management database. The form can be seen in Figure 29. From these it can be determined that key information currently needed for sales leads are the lead's contact details, their location and organization, industry, product interests and the reason for inquiry. Interviews support the validity of these data elements as most important.

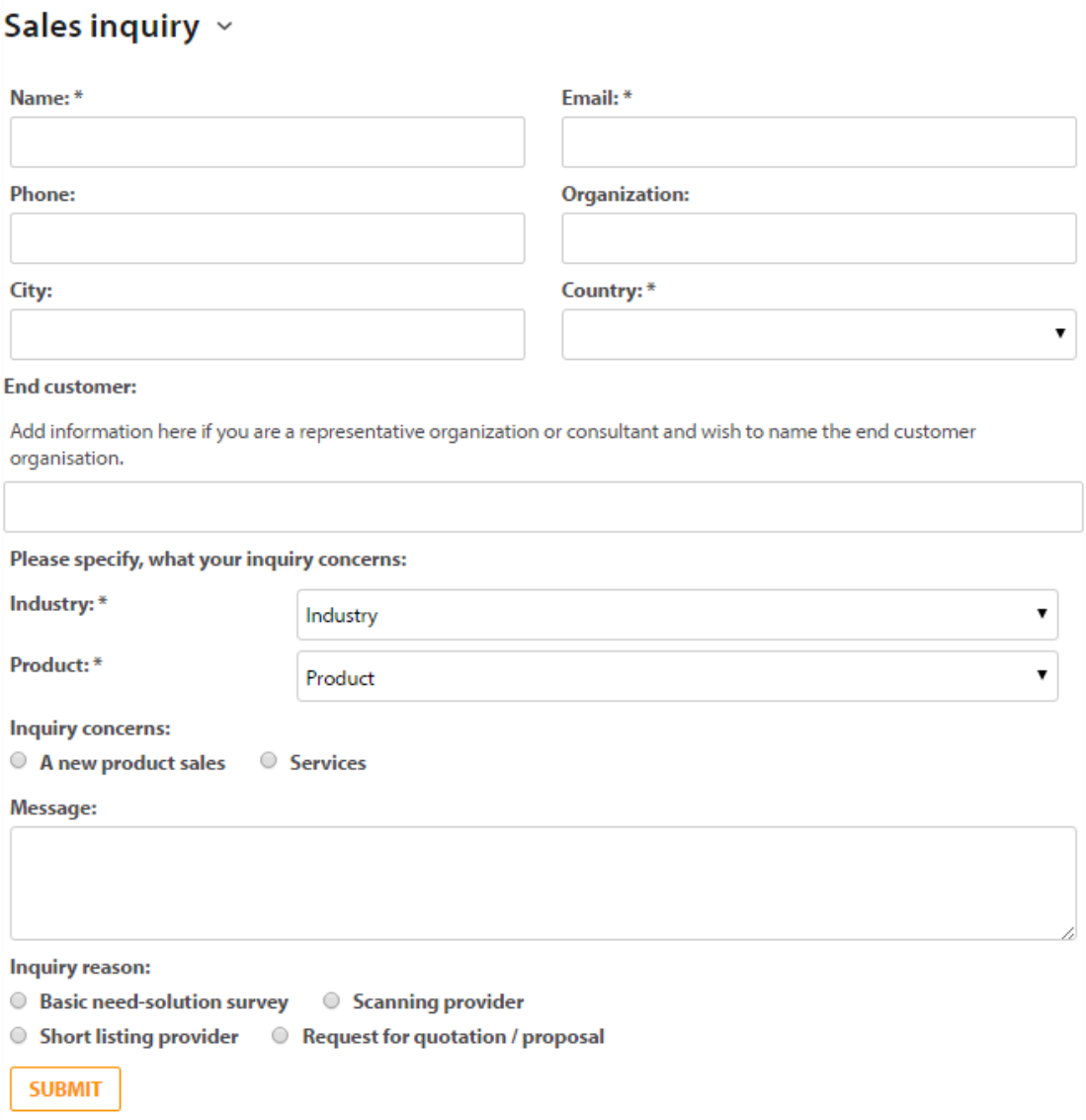


Figure 28. *Sales inquiry form on Metso's public website.*

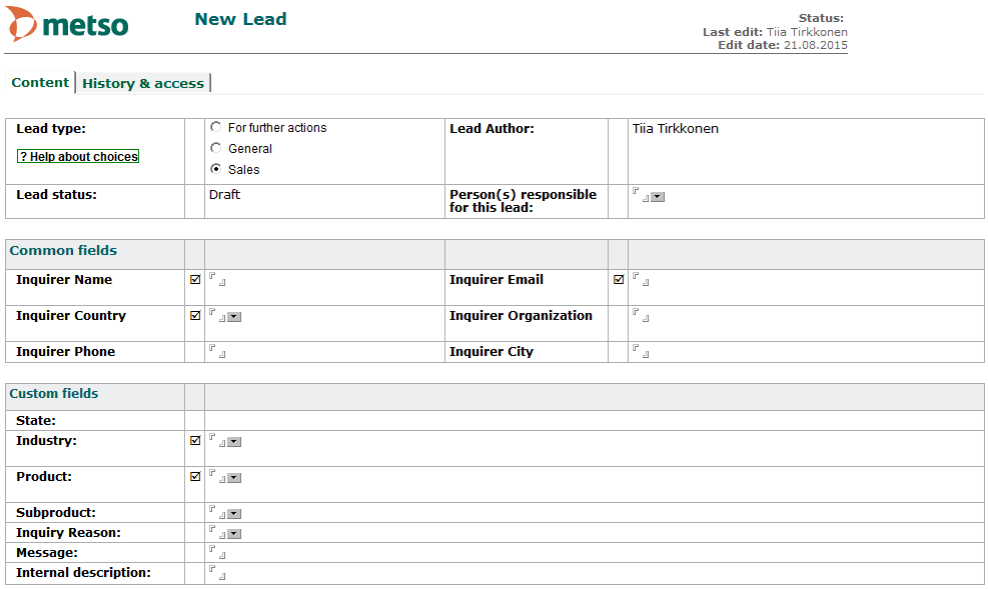


Figure 29. *New lead form in Metso's current web lead management system.*

Interview participants mostly unanimously agreed that the information that is currently required truly is the most relevant information for a lead entered through the form. Contact information is, of course, required for it to be possible to contact the person who left the inquiry. Location and solution interests are the next most important, as they both help assign the lead to the correct expert internally as well as give validity to the lead. From the types of data discussed in chapter 3.1, this can be considered basic data. Currently, most prospects fill out the information at a satisfactory level. The rest is solved through collaboration.

In addition to the basic data that is filled out on the form, the amount of effort a prospect has put into filling out the web inquiry usually gives good indication of how seriously they are considering a purchase. Willingness to collaborate and share information indicates their intentions have not changed.

> *Participant 1: "The customer is willing to reveal that the things their trace indicates they are interested in, they have a budget for it, and they have shared information about Metso also onward to their networks."*

> *Participant 3: "You need basic contact data and something concrete that the prospect is interested in. It's not like they would write a story on the web inquiry form, but recognizing that they have put some effort into leaving the contact request, it tells that it is a potential prospect."*

In fact, when asked about an ideal customer or lead for Metso, all interview participants agreed that it is a company or person that is willing to share information, both to the potential supplier as well as internally to their networks. Sharing interests was considered a sign by most participants that the prospect is intending to buy, making the lead more

potential. While being able to recognize that effort has been put into writing the web inquiry initially gives a lead its quality, collaboration can enhance that quality. Having a digital trace that indicates the prospect shows true interest in the supplier's offering was also considered to be one of the traits of an ideal customer by some participants.

> *Participant 1: "A good customer has used many of the existing channels we manage to find information, and has of course left a trace. That way we can more easily get on the same wavelength when discussing solutions."*

Ideal customers are typically not the companies interested only in the price of a product, but more in the full lifecycle support and knowledge the supplying company can provide. All participants agreed on this statement in some form. Again, this information is best solved through interaction with the prospect. Being in contact helps identify whether a lead could be an ideal customer, but it doesn't need to be known right away, since all valid inquiries are responded to in any case.

> *Participant 2: "We look for customers who really look at the total cost of ownership… We have so much more knowledge than anyone else that customers who approach us that are considering the full process are the ones we really want to try and work with."*

> *Participant 3: "Information about roles or whether the prospect is an end customer or a dealer gives credibility to the lead. Of course with some kind of lead scoring in place, knowing this information would positively affect the score."*

> *Participant 5: "An open relationship, where information is shared in both directions and we are both committed to long-term development, aiming for win-win situation, where when the customer succeeds, also the supplier succeeds."*

It was also noted in one interview that there should not be a need for the customer to classify their own information when filling out the web form. Business area and segment naming are changing within Metso often, but the prospect leaving the lead should not be challenged with figuring out how they fit into the classification. Data in fields like "industry" and "product" are important to have, but the terminology used should be simple for prospects to understand. While literature often the need to understand customer challenges, through interviews it was found that it was considered more typical for customers to approach by asking directly about products instead of sharing their challenges.

> *Participant 5: "Yeah I guess that's how it should go, that we look more for the high level challenge, and that the product and solution should come later on. Not try to solve the case product first. In practice, customers approach with an inquiry about products. Understanding customer challenges better could help find where there is potential, and what kinds of products could be needed in different segments."*

If “too much” information is asked for already on the web inquiry form, it may not be filled out to the level that the receiver would consider it fully qualified in any case, still leaving the need to be in contact to fulfill the information. For example BANT data about budget, authority, need and timeline of the lead may not even be available yet when the inquiry is sent, and interview participants agreed that it is information that is found out through collaboration with the customer. In fact, only contact and interest information was considered vital to know before the first contact is established, everything else is solved through communication.

> *Participant 3: “Regardless of the timing, we need to pick up the phone and talk to people… Again here, less is more. All information would be nice to have and get, but most important at this point is that we get contacts to leave their contact information.”*

One participant mentioned that the data actually needed for use in the sales process depends on the company using it and information requirements. The data that is currently gathered through the web form has been defined in a workshop when Metso as a company was still organized a bit differently, but findings in this research support that those initial data requirements are still relevant. Ensuring this data is good in quality is an important element of the usability of the system it is stored in (Collins 1985), and usability was considered a key requirement of the information system by several interview participants. Figure 30 summarizes the key data and information elements related to leads.

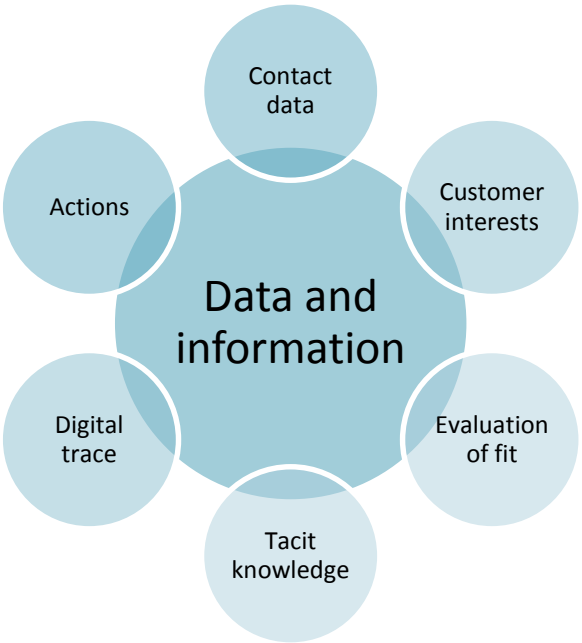


Figure 30. *Data and information in leads.*

Many of the data variables discussed in chapter 3.1 were gone through with interview participants, and of them, customer contact and interest data was considered most relevant. All other discussed variables are under “Evaluation of fit” in Figure 30, as they were

considered information that is solved in collaboration with the customer after the initial contact request was sent. Tacit knowledge refers to the knowledge required to evaluate the given information and estimate the prospect's potential. This is also linked to roles in lead management, already discussed in chapter 5.2.

The digital trace is more of background information that can be solved about the customer by seeing what pages they have visited online and what information they have searched for. This can include the lead source, which was considered a key bit of information, especially for reporting and evaluating the success of different lead generation methods. Finally, actions and ongoing activities with the lead were of interest to track, as they can tell about the success of leads as well.

While lead generation itself is outside the scope of this thesis, it was considered an important information element when looking at the whole picture of lead management at Metso. Knowledge of how leads have been generated can help sales support those channels. Information about how successful campaigns have been executed should especially be shared, so that best practices can be adapted also to campaigns being executed in other business areas. Information about new products would be required to be able to share it with existing customers, and possibly generate more proactive leads.

5.4 Evaluating and using lead information

This section helps solve the research question "How can the quality of leads and lead information be evaluated and improved?" by discussing the quality and usability of the information provided. Based on information requirements, also possibilities of what kinds of analysis and automation could support lead management were investigated, in response to the research question "What is the role of analytics in lead qualification?". Needs related to the information system came up often, as it is usually the place where information is systematically stored and viewed. Both of these questions are only answered briefly through interviews, however, findings in the theoretical section of this thesis cover the topics more thoroughly.

As already mentioned in chapter 5.1, one of the key requirements of successful lead management is the existence and availability of quality data and information. Data quality dimensions as well as ways of evaluating the information were explored in chapter 3, and methods for evaluating it especially in chapter 3.2. It was considered essential that the information system can provide reliable information to act upon.

Tacit knowledge is also needed in evaluating the quality of leads. Sales' knowledge related to leads was already discussed in chapters 5.1 and 5.2. The system usually isn't able to evaluate whether or not a lead is legitimate or how potential it is, as long as data is correctly entered into fields. This requires a "human eye" and some experience, so that an initial estimate of the lead's validity can be formed.

The possibility of using some sort of lead scoring was mentioned in one interview, but it was felt that there may not yet be enough data for it to generate relevant results. The participant also was not aware of how Metso compares to other companies in the area of lead management.

One participant shared that some analysis has already been done, especially in marketing functions, to be able to forecast lead value to some level. Google Analytics has been utilized to categorize leads. For example, it could be seen from the Analytics dashboard that there have been five queries about crushers in a certain area. Based on prior knowledge, it is known that a won case usually generates about 500 thousand euros of revenue. However, it is not possible to directly follow if these cases are actually won.

Analysis of opportunities is also ongoing in the Salesforce CRM system. Opportunity reports were considered good, and it was suggested by a few participants that similar things could also be measured about leads. An example could be the reasons leads are not being converted into opportunities, similarly as to how it is being tracked why opportunities are not being converted into sales. Also the rates of how many leads do convert or how many opportunities are won are also of interest.

Reports were considered a valuable part of the existing CRM system by several participants who it was discussed with, as they have been defined based on KPIs and information requirements, therefore often being able to directly provide the needed information. One participant called for attention should be more clearly drawn to new leads in reporting, to enable their systematic management from the start. There may be several related employees from sales, product support and other functions, all able to lend their support to the case. Information about how this collaboration has succeeded is also of interest, so best practices can be found and implemented more universally within the company.

While the ideal customer was already discussed in relation to data and information in leads in chapter 5.3, in literature the ideal customer profile was often used for evaluating the quality of leads. This is discussed especially in chapter 2. Through interviews, the aim was to define an ideal customer profile for Metso that could be used when evaluating the quality and validity of new leads. The ideal customer profile also ties in with successful lead management from chapter 5.1, where it could be determined that sales needs to be working with the right companies and with people in the correct roles for lead management to succeed.

Figure 31 summarizes the topics brought up in interviews that describe how the quality of leads could be evaluated and improved as well as how the information could be used. These were the main elements that came up in interviews, though some of them were not yet that familiar. The elements that were found can be considered more possibilities based on literature than existing methods based on interviews.

Figure 31. *Lead quality and analysis.*

Reports give information to their users about leads, and especially sales management can use them to evaluate the success of lead management in their area. Tacit knowledge is in an inevitable role, as experience is usually what enables the qualification of leads when it cannot be done systematically. Lead scoring was considered as a possibility for evaluating leads, but it is not yet very familiar at least to all interview participants, and was received with some skepticism in interviews. The ideal customer was discussed, and it was found that most participants considered the ideal customer to have similar traits. This would indicate comparing leads to it could also help in their evaluation. Finally, lead qualification and analysis sets requirements for the information system. Requirements of the information system are discussed further in chapter 6.5.

6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to come empirical findings with literature and generate discussion about the findings and option for future development. This includes some of the researcher's own interpretations of findings that eventually helped reach conclusions. Themes correspond those discussed in chapter 5 results. Additionally, there is discussion on translating findings into system requirements as well as a brief summary of discussion. The guidelines proposed in this thesis should support system development, and discussing them here in further detail aims to support future development plans.

6.1 Requirements for successful lead management

At Metso, traits of an ideal customer include especially their willingness to actively collaborate with the supplier, share information internally and interest in a comprehensive solution that includes products, services and knowledge. Ross & Tyler (2012) and sources in Table 1 also found this to be a trait of a good lead: finding the right influencers that are willing to share information gives the lead quality and potential. The profile, as defined per findings in this thesis, can be seen in Figure 32. Metso should aim to find these customers and sales can use their experience and knowledge to consider whether or not a quotation should be issued for every inquiry that is submitted. Based on literature, a more committed prospect is more likely to purchase, and is therefore also willing to put more effort into getting a quotation. These are the prospects and customers that time should be spent on, and are also more likely to get proposals better suited to their needs, since they have shared the information that is required for providing an optimal solution.

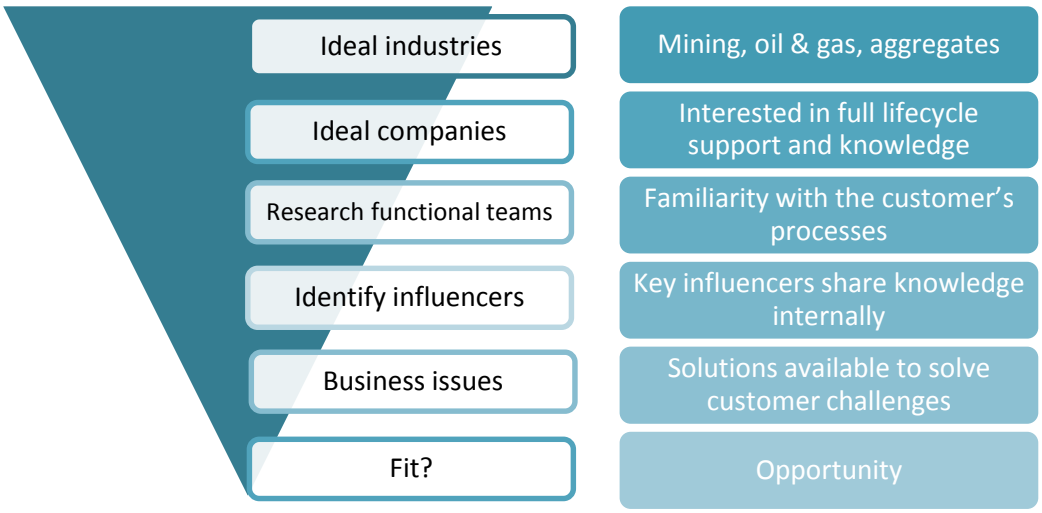


Figure 32. *The customer targeting funnel for Metso.*

The criteria of ideal companies currently looks at companies that fit the ideal customer profile described in interviews, but could be extended to also define trigger events in

companies that may create a need for Metso's products. This profile could be used throughout lead qualification to solve the prospect's fit, as well as in proactive lead generation to find companies that should be targeted (e.g. Jolson & Wotruba 1992; Roberts-Phelps 2001; Ramakrishnan et al. 2006; Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010). The identification of trigger events and seeing them happen in prospect companies can support more proactive lead generation (Roberts-Phelps 2001; Ramakrishnan et al. 2006; Ross & Tyler 2012), which is a strategic goal. Going forward, the profile should be regularly updated to correspond with changing requirements and markets (Roberts-Phelps 2001). Especially as more data becomes available and the change process toward proactivity in sales advances, the profile may need to be updated to better correspond with new situations.

Key finding: *An ideal customer is willing to share information both internally and to the supplier. A digital trace of their path online can help give initial information about what their core areas of interest are. Ideal customers are ultimately interested in full lifecycle support and knowledge that Metso can offer, not just the pricing of products.*

The REAN framework is an example of a model that can be comprehensively used to support lead management. REAN is already in use at Metso, supporting lead generation activities. The different phases, Reach, Engage, Activate and Nurture, describe how a customer relationship progresses from the first contact to a successful partnership. In addition to supporting the lead management process, REAN can also be used for customer segmentation and being able to compare the successes of different indicators in reports.

Ultimately, the financial value of leads interests management. Related also to the lifecycle of a lead, conversion rates from leads to opportunities and opportunities to sales give indication of the success of selling within the company. Figure 33 summarizes an example of what metrics could be utilized in REAN reporting at Metso.

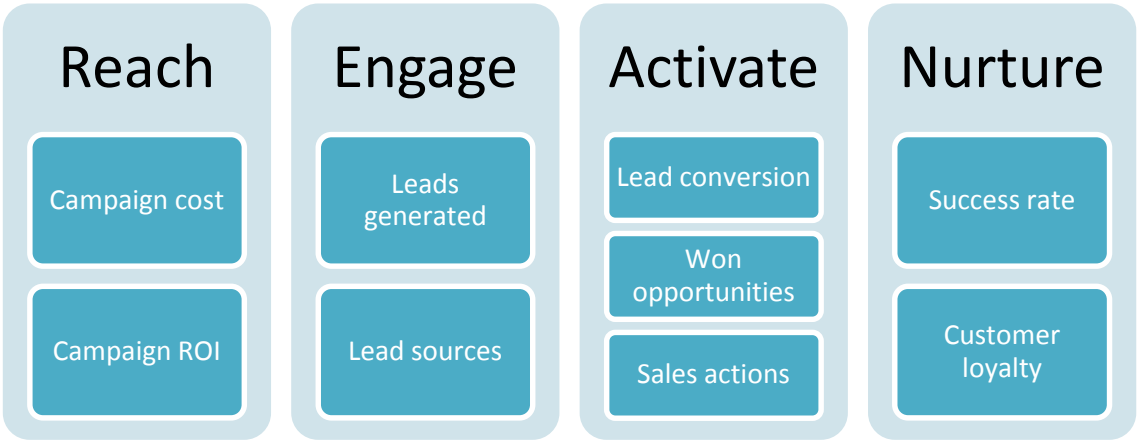


Figure 33. *REAN reporting metrics example.*

Lead conversion rates are considered one of the key metrics in lead management (Ross & Tyler 2012). This is part of the response data that informs about the success of actions

the supplier has taken (Homburg et al. 2001). As response data develops, it fits into the Nurturing phase of the REAN framework, where customer relationships are managed.

The cost of a campaign should also be possible to compare to the value of the new contacts, leads, opportunities and sales it has been able to generate – and this is currently not possible. In addition to informing success rates of campaigns, reporting campaign results can help indicate the marketing department's contribution to sales and be helpful in aligning goals and results between sales and marketing functions (e.g. Kotler et al. 2006; Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010). Estimates of a lead's value could also be possible to generate automatically based on historical information. This would replace the earlier function in which sales could volunteer an estimate of their case's value. This has also already been solved to some level, giving assessments even before there is enough data in the system to base estimates on that.

With targets in place for the key metrics, scoring like the one recommended by Jackson (2009) in chapter 3.3 can be implemented to evaluate the overall success of lead management. However, a better understanding of the existing levels of leads and their conversion rates may be needed before scoring can be set realistically. Dannenberg & Zupancic (2010) emphasize the importance of displaying relevant information, and Jackson (2009) also states that information should be presented in a way that it can be acted upon. In this case, relevant information needs to be generated systematically before it can be combined and scored to give information for actions.

With set targets and clear visibility into the current situation, the types of resources and competence needed can be better evaluated to reach a certain revenue (Roberts-Phelps 2001; Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010). For example, if it is found that marketing campaigns generate proportionally more leads that convert to sales than cold calling by sales functions, either cold calling methods and competence need improvement or the resources spent on it currently should be focused instead towards marketing campaigns. This is an example where when the data is presented clearly, it is easy to act upon it without further analysis. By drilling down into the information, it should also be possible to solve why campaigns are more successful than cold calls, ultimately helping reach a decision.

Communication between different stakeholders was considered important, as were records of activities that are ongoing with a prospect or customer. Kotler et al. (2006) also found communication to be key to be able to support growth across functions. Using a customer relationship management (CRM) platform for sharing coded information is a typical way to do this in companies (e.g. Homburg et al. 2001; Roberts-Phelps 2001; Jackson 2009), and the same applies to Metso, but it is also typical that the information in visit reports is not in a standardized format, making their quality difficult to measure (Homburg et al. 2001; Ramakrishnan et al. 2006). Also knowing how customers have shared information internally could help identify potential, and this could be achieved in part with marketing automation. Hearing about a topic through a network makes it more

difficult to ignore than by, for example, just receiving an email that can quickly be classified as junk (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010, p. 122).

Key finding: *The possibility to easily communicate explicit and implicit knowledge is essential in working with a team and different stakeholders on sales cases.*

Involvement of several functions can support the positive development of a sales case (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010; Ross & Tyler 2012). While information these support functions provide may be based on their tacit knowledge, recording it forms a systematic understanding. When information is recorded systematically and its content is systematic, more predictable implicit information begins to form, that can be used later. A sales representative can internalize this information to be part of their tacit knowledge. Historical data can also help identify the lead's potential (Roberts-Phelps 2001). With the help of data the system provides, it can be easier to identify whether the customer is an existing one, and even further, if they are a company with capabilities to pay their invoices based on historical data.

In addition to other system users being more aware of what is going on with an individual lead, history log actions can support reporting information needs. The involvement of personal contact as early as possible in the lead lifecycle was seen as important, so the system should also give its users the information they need to be in personal contact with the lead. This can include any information they may need to be able to quickly and professionally answer, as a slow or incompetent response could lead to losing the case (Homburg et al. 2001; Roberts-Phelps 2001). Highlighting this key information may be beneficial, so it can be easily found and used. One example could be providing a direct link or contact in the lead record based on what product interests have been selected, so more information would be quick and easy to find. To develop cross-functional selling, other products or services often bought along with this product could also be suggested.

Marketing automation does not yet play a role in lead management and sales management at Metso, but there are plans to incorporate it more and more in the future. Marketing automation would enable the support of different kinds of processes, mostly for marketing use, to be able to support sales and its management. For example, automating steps in lead qualification and the lead management process makes it more autonomous, allowing it to operate with less support from knowledge tied to individuals (Ross & Tyler 2012; DemandGen Report 2014). This decreases risks related to losing competence and capabilities when an individual is out of office or leaves the company.

Lead generation came up as an area for development. It came up in several interviews and can be seen through several of the citations in chapter 5 that there is not yet an abundance of leads to be managed. There also is not yet much knowledge in all business lines about how to run successful campaigns. Sharing this information develops knowledge throughout the organization and make lead generation more successful. This can be

achieved, for example, by creating a knowledge community that revolves around a dashboard in the Salesforce system that tells up-to-date information about historical, ongoing and future campaigns, including activities and their results.

Key finding: *The systematic qualification of leads that sales receives is not yet seen as a requirement, as the number of leads generated is not yet abundant.*

While there are targets and initiatives to improve lead generation, there may also be a hidden fear in sales that they won't be able to manage a greater amount of leads coming in. This could be in part due to the fact that it would require changes in their ways of working as well as tools they would need to start using to be able to manage the volume. One of the goals of this research was to help prepare for the volume, also giving sales a better readiness to start working with a larger amount of inbound leads. However, since most interview participants were eventually sales management instead of representatives, the focus shifted slightly, and more feedback may still be required.

Luckily management at Metso is dedicated to the development of sales competence and marketing automation. Resources and strategy have been focused on reaching goals of becoming more customer-centric and proactive, which gives the initiative a better chance of succeeding (e.g. Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010). Management also saw in interviews that it was part of their role to solve what kinds of competence development is needed and arrange for it.

Key finding: *Management and strategy are supportive of the transformation towards a more proactive and customer-centric organization.*

For competence to develop along with strategic changes in the company, it is important that top management continues to be supportive of the initiatives being taken and also share their support through systematic communication. Each employee should understand their significance in the change process and role in the organization, which may require further role definition for systematic ways of working. In literature, especially the importance of the handover of leads from marketing to sales was emphasized (e.g. Kotler et al. 2006; Ross & Tyler 2012). Roles and responsibilities at this stage are especially important, as miscommunication could cause misunderstandings, possibly leading to unsatisfied prospects. Data that emerges should also indicate the initiatives are generating intended results. This data should be utilized to give justification to the initiative and support the change process.

While competence can be seen as quite tied to individuals, processes can support competence. In this case, clearly defining the responsibilities of an actor or role can be seen as part of a process definition (Erschik 1989; DemandGen Report 2014). With the help of processes, implicit knowledge can be better utilized and best practices applied more widely within the organization. Tacit knowledge will still need to be applied for each case

to reach the best result, but coding them into processes makes training of new sales representatives more systematic (e.g. Ross & Tyler 2012).

6.2 Roles in lead management

Roles in lead management found in literature were often found to correspond with those at Metso. Figure 11 demonstrates the different roles and their responsibilities in qualifying leads. Figure 12 shows how lead development often works as a funnel, where the amount of leads initiated is much greater than what is actually handed over to sales and, later on, the amount of sales actually generated. Depending on the type of organization, roles may differ and responsibilities should be agreed based on the process and model around lead management. The REAN framework can support finding which phases different roles in the organization should be responsible for. At Metso, leads usually come from marketing efforts or existing customers. Existing customers were considered the best source of leads.

Key finding: *Sales leads are typically company initiated (through marketing efforts) or come from existing customers.*

Figure 34 demonstrates the typical flow of roles the lead is assigned to during its lifecycle and compares roles at Metso to Ross & Tyler's (2012) example of sales roles in the lead management process. Sales development roles consisted of outbound reps, who generate leads, and market response reps, who react to inbound leads. At Metso, these types of activities are seen as done mostly by a marketing role. The information system also plays a role in qualifying the lead and checking its validity. The country lead assignee can work with both lead qualification as well as the selling aspect, while sales managers concentrate on closing sales cases and developing the customer relationship.

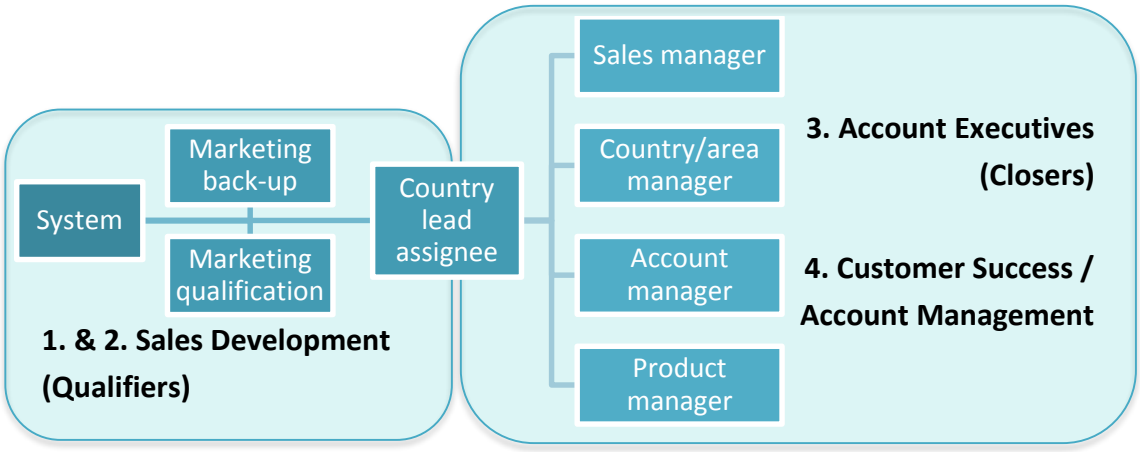


Figure 34. *Lead assignment flow and roles.*

The model is somewhat similar also to Kotler et al.'s (2006) buying funnel from Figure 12, where marketing develops customer and brand awareness, and after handover, sales

develops the relationship from purchase intention to customer loyalty. Problems in communication and feuds between sales and marketing were not seen as big an issue as in some literature (e.g. Homburg et al. 2001; Kotler et al. 2006), but it was agreed that communication can always be improved. Currently marketing initiatives such as campaigns are communicated to sales, so they know what kinds of leads to be expecting soon. Marketing does not yet systematically use the CRM system at Metso, but some piloting was done alongside this thesis in lead and campaign management.

Key finding: *Marketing has a key role in generating and initially qualifying sales inquiries, after which sales develops customers' purchase intentions and closes sales.*

The role of management and support functions was already discussed in chapter 6.1 as part of successful lead management. Top management has a role in supporting strategic initiatives and helping develop competence within the organization. Functions such as product lines and service teams can provide helpful input and information on sales cases, and therefore support the development of the case. This requires sales to be easily able to communicate with the different functions and find the needed information.

The target for service-based leads in one team is five per month per person, and being able to more effectively track and collaborate about them can develop existing customer's satisfaction. Currently these leads are managed in a spreadsheet before being handed over to sales, also partially breaking the flow from lead recognition to the sale. The service engineers identifying these leads would also get better indication about which of their leads are being converted into actual sales, and would be able to support on the case as needed. Especially when leads are initiated by services, it could be helpful for sales to contact the service engineer for more information before contacting the customer.

Related to the role of the information system in providing information, the information needed is based on strategic goals and the source is the data that is entered into the system. Information such as the source of a lead and lead lifecycles indicate the success of lead management activities, and is important for developing business initiatives into being routinely successful. Through a better understanding of the information provided, the whole of lead management can become more systematic. The information system can be configured to support the process in a way that is intuitive to sales' ways of working and at the same time, produces quality data that can be used further in forecasting and planning of future activities. The ideal customer profile also develops through an increase in the amount of data, enabling the system to be configured to predict which leads are the highest in quality and will most likely lead to sales and customer relationships.

Customers and prospects can also be seen as having a role in lead management. They should search for the information provided by their potential supplier, as well communicate with the supplier to find out if they are a fit. The supplying company should also have plenty of information available in a variety of formats and sources, making it easier

for the prospect to evaluate the possible fit even before leaving their contact information (Ross & Tyler 2012). An interested enough prospect will work through this information willingly to find the most fitting supplier for their needs.

6.3 Data and information in leads

While data is usually a single bit, information has meaning and can be used further with the help of knowledge. Knowledge is often tied to people and develops through experiences. Experience also helps recognize what is considered a legitimate lead when first qualifying and assigning them (e.g. Jolson & Wotruba 1992). Implicit knowledge, on the other hand, is considered tacit knowledge that can be codified to some level (Virtainlahti 2009). It is not explicit due to the possibility of different interpretations, but can be more easily communicated than completely tacit knowledge. Being able to codify this knowledge can give it more value, as it can be used by anyone with access to it.

Key finding: *Codifying tacit knowledge makes sharing it easier. Systematic sharing of information internally should be supported by systems and processes.*

Based on the SECI model in Figure 15, there are different methods for transferring knowledge in organizations. Externalization aims to transform knowledge from a tacit to explicit form, meaning it is codified and in a more easily sharable format. Especially when going forward in the REAN process to the phase where customer relationships are nurtured, the data captured related to a customer and their needs is vital for making sure the information can be shared with everyone involved.

At the beginning of the process, the threshold for submitting an inquiry form online should be as low as possible. The prospect may not be willing to share so much on a web form, but through interaction, more basic data can be gathered to support the sales process. It is also considered best practice to not ask for too much data straight off on the web form, as there is a risk that the threshold for leaving the contact information, which is most important, becomes too high (Ross & Tyler 2012; DemandGen Report 2014). As long as contact information and some information about interests is available, the correct person at Metso can be found to be in touch with the prospect.

In addition to basic data variables tied to leads, such as company name, location, industry and product interests that tell who the lead should be assigned to internally, transactional and action data also play a valuable role in lead management. Basic data can be seen as explicit while action data can be considered implicit, consisting of tacit knowledge that has been possible to record to some level. Being able to follow what activities are being taken with a prospect tells about the prospect's willingness to collaborate, and further on their fit to the ideal customer profile. The success of these activities gives response data on how well the prospect has reacted to attempted collaboration.

Since leads come from different sources, the success of each source is possible to compare, for example, by using REAN segmentation. Based on the prospects activities in one phase, how they have behaved earlier on can be investigated to give indication on how successful different marketing initiatives have been, and compare them against each other. It can be considered potential data, helping form an understanding of the potential success of the customer relationship (Homburg et al. 2001). This supports marketing in finding the best ways to reach out to customers, as well as sales on recognizing the types of activities that get prospects to commit to the relationship.

BANT information is often linked to the customer's buying process, also setting a need for sales to familiarize themselves with the prospect's purchasing behavior as the case progresses (Roberts-Phelps 2001; Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010; Monat 2011). Again, tacit knowledge plays a role in the sales reps' ability to learn and adapt to the customer's buying process and gather data when it is acceptable and available.

Contact details, location and product interests are required information, as based on these details the lead can be assigned to the best expert internally, who can then contact and qualify the lead further. Contact and location information can be considered basic or demographic data (Homburg et al. 2001; DemandGen Report 2014). The effort the lead contact has put into the inquiry usually indicates their level of interest and engagement – clearly stated needs and willingness to collaborate and give more information later on reveals that the prospect more likely has intention to make a purchase. The information needed to create a quotation can usually be solved through collaboration, which is why sales at Metso agreed that the threshold for leaving the inquiry should be as low as possible, since they will be in touch with the lead contact in any case for more information. Prior research agrees with this theory.

Key finding: *The web inquiry form should ask for a minimal amount of information so that the threshold for leaving contact details is low. In addition to contact details, information about interests is initially important. Collaboration with the prospect is the best way to solve additional information about the lead and its potential business value.*

While a process should support information generation and usage, information is also wanted about lead management and sales processes. The information requirements can start already at the campaign level. Once a lead is sent, everything from its handling times in different stages to actions taken with the lead are of interest to management. Planning of sales activities and levels of collaboration can give indication of the effort put into the lead from both the supplier and prospect. This is part of action data, which tells what actions the supplier company has taken with its prospects (Homburg et al. 2001), and can also be linked to the Activate phase of REAN (Jackson 2009). Accurate data supports forecasting and account management (Kotler et al. 2006). Data about the leads can also

be used to help guide marketing efforts (Monat 2011). In the REAN framework, campaigns can be seen as part of the Reach phase, while the generated leads are linked more closely to the Engage phase (Jackson 2009).

Tacit knowledge is part of the competence of people working with leads, and develops over time through experience. The system should be able to use the data and information in leads to qualify it and recommend which leads are the most valuable, based on defined rules. The whole picture of lead management can be viewed, for example, through reports that show how many leads have been entered, what their sources are and at what rate they are being converted into opportunities and sales.

6.4 Evaluating and using lead information

Data quality is essential for being able to generate information. The information should be utilized within the Salesforce CRM system in reports and dashboards that guide actions and decisions. Once more data is available, targets can be set and the ability to reach them scored so that different functions and KPIs become easier to compare against each other. Scoring can be done using a model such as Jackson's (2009) REAN scoring framework, described in chapter 3.3.

To support quality lead information generation, the processes related to creating the information should be in place and validate that the quality is at an acceptable level. While it may be unrealistic to expect flawless data, processes ensure it is created in a way that it is more likely to be valid and usable. The processes are often supported systematically, and information systems can also help catch exceptions and errors related to the data. Consistency of the data is especially important when it may be coming from more than one information system, so that it is possible to combine and compare. This gives visibility into the whole process of sales management, which was seen as a key part of future development. One way to do this is align system statuses and actions to correspond to those in the real world (Wand & Wang 1996), similarly to how has been done in the existing lead management database.

The continuous validity of data could be improved, for example, with the help of a model like the one presented in Table 3, which offers a checklist and process for assuring the quality of data in an organization. The AIMQ framework can also be used to evaluate the quality of existing data and areas of it that need improvement (Lee et al. 2002). Data quality should be ensured as it can be used to support the change process in the organization (Wand & Wang 1996; Jackson 2009).

Key finding: *Quality data is a requirement for the systems and processes using it to function seamlessly, as well as the foundation for successful change management in an organization. The creation and existence of quality data should be supported by systematic validations and processes.*

The web inquiry form used for entering sales lead through the public website currently requires certain fields to be filled out, helping validate that these fields are being filled out. The existing lead management database as well as Salesforce also enforce filling out certain fields when creating leads. Salesforce also allows the validation of the format of the data being entered, for example by ensuring numbers are being entered in the field a phone number is asked for. Currently when leads come in and the required fields are filled out, the lead is typically already seen as marketing qualified. The information is usually evaluated for legitimacy by the person the lead is assigned to by the system. The system uses the location and industry mentioned on the lead to assign it to the nominated person automatically.

Requirements related to data indicate that the current process of collecting certain data on the web form and other data through collaboration with the customer is successful as is. The system could, however, be more supportive of topics that are collaborated on, for example by including some kind of checklist of areas of discussion. As more data becomes available, the quality of the lead also increases. Quality could be measured by a scoring system that evaluates the collaboration between the prospect and supplier, since willingness to collaborate was seen as one of the key traits of an ideal customer. Increasing amounts of data as well as recorded sales activities would be good indicators that collaboration has occurred.

The scoring system is expected to develop over time to become more accurate, once more data is entered into the system with the help of lead quality checklists (e.g. Monat 2011, p. 191). What exactly the data elements or lead behavior are that usually lead to successful sales activities can be tracked and incorporated into the system once they have been verified to be valid for the company in question. Scoring is developed based on findings to give more points or weight to activities that indicate the lead closely matches the ideal customer profile. (DemandGen Report 2014, p. 9)

Sales inquiries sometimes come in as general inquiries, and the general inquiry form requires less fields to be filled out. In these cases, the system may not know who to route the lead to, since the country and industry may be defined somewhere other than their designated fields. This could be improved by teaching the information system to recognize values also from general text fields – this way, the lead would be routed to the correct person more quickly, decreasing the time spent on routing the lead and making the process more efficient. The process becomes also more self-managing, as the system would be able to find the correct assignee without requiring a person to evaluate it. Especially if the amount of leads coming in grows, this can help decrease possible bottlenecks if someone is out of office. Regular verification of the success of the system in recognizing who to route leads to should also be done, to ensure the process is working as it should.

Since collaboration was identified as key way to gather information about the lead for qualification, the information system should promote collaboration and offer a simple

way to record information about it. The amount of collaboration could be evaluated by the system, based on which the lead could be given a score that indicates its level of qualification. The score should also be based on data variables that are available, as well as the subjective evaluation of the person handling the lead. While information variables tied to a lead can be a good indicator of its quality, nothing can completely replace the tacit knowledge evaluation of a salesperson that has experience with handling different kinds of leads. The scoring framework should develop over time and could also be partly based on subjective evaluations later on, if they become consistent in some way.

By using a scoring framework and automated lead qualification, tracking leads becomes more dynamic and flexible. Automation that is built into a system can be developed based on changing requirements over time, so that it always corresponds to the current requirements related to lead management. Marketing automation is often used to support already existing functionality in CRM systems. With the help of marketing automation and web analytics, information about lead behavior can be retrieved and analyzed. This way, the supplier can gain information about their lead even before active collaboration begins. However, it is important that both the supplier and prospect are able to trust the security of the information being collected and stored, as part of the integrity of the data. The digital trace of a lead is valuable information to a supplying company, but sales representatives may need to be careful about using the information if the prospect does not know what all is being collected about them. It should be made clear to someone browsing a company website that their path there may be used to analyze interests, if needed.

Key finding: *The use of marketing automation makes data more valuable, as it can be utilized in automating steps in the lead management processes.*

While many sources stated leads should be strictly qualified before quoting or prospects should be made to "work for quotes" (e.g. Jolson & Wotruba 1992; Homburg et al. 2001; Ross & Tyler 2012), interview participants from Metso shared that they aim to answer every legitimate inquiry that is received and at least in one business area, a quotation can be and is done almost every time. This is another indication that there may be a need for more leads before there is a requirement to use more systematic methods in lead qualification. While all inquiries should still be promptly answered to, having prospects commit more before sending out a quotation could improve chances of winning a case.

6.5 Information system requirements

As part of developing the lead management system (chapter 4.1), interview results were analyzed further to form a set of system requirements. The information system is used by many of the other roles involved in the process, and often guides work at different stages.

One area that arose as important is the information system's usability. The information system is somehow related to every research question. For the purpose of this thesis, it is

considered as having a role in the lead management process. Additionally, it stores and makes information available for use. That information can be evaluated with the help of the system, and the system can also automatically validate information to ensure quality. Data quality ties into being a requirement for successful lead management. To close the circle, one part of successful lead management is to understand the different roles that are involved in the process, as well as being able to use the information system to record and find information.

The information system should both support communication between its users and make history log activities visible to those who need to see what actions have been taken with the lead. This is a typical feature of a communicative CRM system, also known as a workflow system (Homburg et al. 2001). The CRM system works as a platform for both information and communication, enabling both the viewing and sharing of information (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010; Ross & Tyler 2012). Seeing activity history helps identify, for example, when the stage of a lead has changed or when it has been disqualified, as well as the reasons.

Key finding: *The CRM system should be communicative, supporting the sharing and viewing of codified information so that leads can be answered professionally and quickly.*

The CRM system at Metso is used for analytical purposes also in addition to communicative purposes. Analytical CRM systems help combine data from different sources to be able to develop a full view of customer activities (Homburg et al. 2001). Data is integrated into the CRM from both ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) and CPQ (Configure, Price and Quote) tools, giving information about quotations and orders that have been done to different customers. Customer data is maintained in SAP to ensure quality and validity as well as to avoid duplicates, but it has been found that keeping this information up to date sometimes causes frustration in sales due to the requirements and levels of validation done to the data before it is approved for use. All data that is entered directly into the CRM or that is integrated from other sources can be combined into reports or dashboards, providing a visual representation of ongoing activities.

Key finding: *The CRM system should be analytical and allow combining data from different sources for reporting.*

For management, the system offers a tool in which they can track cases in their area of responsibility through reporting and dashboards. The existing CRM supports both communication and analysis within one system. Main development areas for the system are to develop usability and functionality without compromising data quality. Clearly defined business requirements should be used as the basis for developing marketing automation capabilities and lead qualification management.

In terms of functionality and design requirements, the system should be as simple as possible to use with functionality similar to that of the existing lead management database.

Taking actions in the existing system automatically generates changes in status, and should continue to do so in the future. The system should also signal to its users what actions they should be taking, and the outcomes indicate the usefulness of the system (Wand & Wang 1996). The existing system already does this in a sense: if a user sees the lead status is "delegated" and it is assigned to them, they know they should take the next action on it, such as sending a response to the prospect.

The system should also play a role in validating and classifying the data that is being entered. Defined key words, such as industries and countries, help identify who the lead should be assigned to. This is tied to data quality and validity. If key information is missing, it should alert someone monitoring cases that the system has not been able to automatically classify. Sales inquiries are sometimes also entered as general inquiries, and the general inquiry form asks for notably less information than the sales inquiry does. While the same information may be there, currently it is not able to assign the lead due to key words not being in their designated fields, requiring a person to evaluate the inquiry in more detail. Summarized in Table 6 are the main requirements of the lead management system that were identified through interviews and observation.

Table 6. *Lead management system requirements.*

Communication	**Function/design**
• Automatic history log • Ability to record related actions • Information available • System and information availability anywhere	• Automated and manual emails, also in rich text format • Automated status changes based on actions • Simple interface • Information easy to update
Process	**Validation**
• Leads entered as marketing-qualified • Automated and manual delegation of leads internally • Follow-up and management of leads • Marketing automation • Full process visibility	• Easy to identify leads in different stages, e.g. new, overdue • Information quality evaluation • Classification assignments based on source, interests, etc.

Part of the current functionality is sending both automated and manual emails directly from the system, internally and to customer contacts. Some templates should be available, but writing one's own text and enriching it with, for example, pictures should be possible.

The system should also function in a way that makes it easy for users to update information or send impulses to update it. The amount of information that needs to be maintained is very high, and sets expectations for users as well. On the other hand, information

quality was seen as a key requirement for being able to systematically manage and use the information provided. In general, the new system was seen as somewhat too heavy-duty to use. While in interviews many participants noted the prospect should have very low threshold for leaving their contact information online, some also commented that the threshold for internal Metso users for using that information should also be low.

Attention should be paid especially to the interface design and its intuitive usability. Impulses for updating information should also be easy to send to help with data validity. Some enhancements to the interface can be done to support work that can be done either in the same system or elsewhere. For example, company websites could be embedded into the lead record layout, making it faster for marketing to qualify and classify leads directly from the interface.

In addition to being usable, the system needs to support the lead management process. This process was already explored from the system perspective in Figure 24. Figure 35 simplifies the process from the sales perspective into a more linear model. The system should support work that is done outside of the system in addition to the steps that are recorded in the system.

Figure 35. *Lead management process simplified.*

Leads have been managed at Metso in a database system, and once marked as processed, visibility into future actions taken with them has, for the most part, vanished. Opportunities are currently being managed in the cloud-based CRM system Salesforce.com, where sales organizations should enter leads at the stage when they begin to work on them. Prior to the use of the CRM, opportunities were mainly managed in quote-and-order systems. Due to the different systems that leads and opportunities are managed in, conversion rates of leads into opportunities are difficult to follow and therefore also the success of marketing initiatives may be difficult to measure. One of the main benefits of CRM systems is the availability of the information to anyone who has access to it. The information provided should be possible to act upon as is, without too much further analysis.

The absence of full process visibility somewhat contradicts the requirement of being able to use and act upon the information that systems provide. This also supports the fact that lead management should be transferred from the old database system onto the same plat-

form as other CRM activities. The Salesforce system supports lead management and direct conversion of leads into opportunities. Functionality can be customized based on requirements. As the main role of the information system should be to provide information, migrating all related activities onto one platform is a key step in integrating the information related to lead management from start to finish.

When comparing requirements to functionality offered by the Salesforce system, basic process management and communication activities should be possible to implement fairly simply. History tracking and linking activities to a lead record are possible in the solution "out of the box". Salesforce even offers a web-to-lead functionality that helps automate the sending of leads from websites into the system, including the possibility to add classification to the lead already when it is entered based on data in certain fields. The Salesforce system is also available almost anywhere, as it can be used on both mobile devices and any web browser. Offline use is not yet fully supported, which is sometimes considered an issue if internet is not available at customer sites or the use of mobile devices is not allowed. Availability of information anywhere is considered an important part of its usability (Homburg et al. 2001; Dannenberg & Zupancic 2010).

7. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, theoretical and empirical findings are summarized, the validity of the research and its results are evaluated as a whole and possible topics for further research are presented. By answering the research sub-questions, the main research question is answered to in chapter 7.1 based on literature and interview findings, and some courses of action are recommended. Both the findings and recommendations are, however, documented at rather a high level in this thesis. These will be developed further in cooperation with stakeholders before implementing them as system requirements. The success of the research as a whole and results are evaluated in chapter 7.2, and possible further research topics are discussed in chapter 7.3.

The main result of this thesis should be a set of guidelines for developing sales lead qualification in the CRM system to meet the needs of sales. To reach this goal, different stakeholders have been consulted on their requirements and needs related to lead management, as well as the use of different tools and methods considered. The guidelines will focus on utilizing data that is tied to leads to optimize the time spent on them.

As the scope has been limited to concentrate on the receiving end of the lead management process, and not the lead gathering phase, the proposed guidelines will also concentrate there. However, all phases of the full lead management process will be considered where applicable. As a result, sales organizations should have an easy and effective way to receive, nurture and convert leads into actual sales cases. Management should also have visibility into what is going on with sales leads.

7.1 Research conclusions

The goal of this thesis was to research how the CRM system at Metso could be best used to support sales in lead qualification management work by identifying the guidelines for information system development. The main research question was “How can the lead management process be best supported at Metso?”, and to solve this, stakeholders were interviewed and prior research around the topic was investigated.

The first sub-question was “What are the requirements for successfully managing leads?”. In previous research, the main areas emphasized were the existence of a process, an information system that supports it and management that is dedicated to succeeding in lead management. Quality data and information were seen as an essential part of the information system, as it can support both the processes as well as management. With the help of quality data, the reasons for changing processes and ways of working can be better justified. To interpret the information, knowledge and competence are needed.

In literature, lead qualification often includes a scoring system that is based on the data, which helps identify the leads that are most valuable to the company. The score is often based on an ideal customer profile – a profile of a company that is the ideal customer for different reasons – and leads are compared to this profile to validate their value for the supplier. Based on interviews, the ideal customer for Metso is one that is willing to share information and wants full process support from its supplier, including knowledge, products and services.

Marketing efforts support successful lead management in the sense that they provide the raw material to work with – the leads. This can be considered part of their role. Defining roles both within the organization and at the customer make it clearer for people participating in the sales cases what their responsibilities are and what is expected of them. Usually a first responsibility is contacting the prospect personally as early on as possible. This enables Metso to influence the customer and their decisions, often enabling for more successful development of the case. Knowing that contact has occurred and following other actions related to the lead are also important, which requires a usable system to support the full process.

The second research sub-question was "What kinds of roles and responsibilities do people and information systems have in the lead management process?". In literature it was typically considered that in smaller organizations sales has a more significant role in both lead generation as well as qualification and nurturing, while in larger organizations, marketing typically initiates and qualifies the leads while sales receives and nurtures them. Lead generation is generally considered a marketing task (e.g. Kotler et al. 2006). This is best demonstrated in Figure 11 and Figure 12.

Metso is a relatively large organization that consists of smaller organizations. The smaller organizations can consist of people working in a specific country or market area, or in a certain business area. Marketing was often responsible for initiating and qualifying leads, typical for large organizations. However, for a lead to qualify, it was often considered enough that the entered data was usable. Checking the lead's company's legitimacy and further qualification was either up to a designated person per country that initially receives all leads or the sales person it was assigned to later on. All legitimate leads are contacted in any case within a defined time frame.

If possible, there may be reason for marketing to take on a more significant role in initial lead qualification. They should work closely together with sales to hand over the leads at the time when nurturing has already started. This leaves more time for sales to use their core competence of developing customer relationships and initiating leads from existing customers, which were considered usually the most valuable leads. Sales has an important role in influencing the customer's purchasing decision and developing the case in collaboration with people from support functions such as product lines.

The customer or prospect plays a role in lead management as a collaborator. Without information provided by the customer, it is difficult for sales to provide a relevant quotation. Sales' role is also to understand these customer needs and be able to convert them into solutions. Even though customers often approach with direct interest in certain products, sales should be able to identify a possible need for other solutions from the offering as well. To ensure sales is competent for this, management supports competence development. Top management also drives strategic initiatives and designates resources needed for reaching targets.

The information system supports processes related to marketing and sales, and CRM systems are typically used for tracking and managing activities related to leads. Additionally the CRM system works as a platform for communication and internal collaboration about leads. This should also be the platform where sales and marketing share information and codify their tacit knowledge about leads. The main role of the system is to provide information to its users, whether it be at the level of a single lead or understanding the whole picture of lead management within an organization. A lead record should have enough information on it so that anyone with access to view it is able to work on it, without forgetting the value of tacit knowledge tied to the lead. The system should provide the information in a format that is easy to understand and that both sales representatives and management can act on without having to analyze it first.

The third research sub-question is "What kinds of data and information are tied to leads?". This can be seen as divided into explicit, implicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit information consists mostly of the data elements that are tied to a sales lead and can be defined rather unambiguously. Some of this data can be entered through the sales inquiry form, but it is best practice to not ask for too much information at first. This is basic data, which is usually easily attainable (Homburg et al. 2001). The collected data should enable the receiving company to be in contact with the inquirer, but other needed information can easily be gathered through online searches and interactions with the prospect.

Explicit information can also include the digital trace that the prospect has left online when searching for information. It can reveal their interests and help sales be more prepared early on in communications. The customer's interests need to be solved in any case, and along with contact data, are considered the most relevant pieces of information in a lead. Evaluating if the lead could potentially be a customer is done by solving other information variables, such as their timing or budget. Tacit knowledge is needed to interpret this information and evaluate the potential of the lead.

Actions that have been taken with the lead were of interest to management and are also part of sharing information about the lead. Codifying tacit knowledge into activity records in the system makes the information implicit. Being able to actually utilize the implicit knowledge in evaluating the quality of the lead would support systematic work in sales.

The fourth research sub-question is “How can the quality of leads and lead information be evaluated and improved?”, and is closely tied to the previous question on what kinds of data and information are tied to leads. Data requirements set demands for the processes that are used to generate the data. Processes and systems should be defined to produce complete and quality data, regardless of its source. This data can then be further used in other processes, and not being able to rely on it can cause challenges. Homburg et al. (2001) agree that the ability to execute sales activities professionally with the customer requires that the information about that customer is valid in the systems used. The validity of the data should be continuously tracked using different verification methods.

The tacit knowledge sales representatives have could be utilized as part of a scoring framework. Comparing data in leads to an ideal customer profile gives it initial value, but sales’ evaluations could develop the score. For example, if a meeting is seen as successful and next steps have been agreed, the sales representatives may evaluate the lead to be very potential. In reporting, sales’ evaluations could be compared to the actual success rates of cases, giving indication of how well the estimates hold true. Giving numerical estimates of success would also enable some level of standardization for collaboration, also making the measurement of it easier. Reports and dashboards can be used to display the information in a format that is usable.

The final research sub-question is “What is the role of analytics in lead qualification?”, which is again tied closely to information and the evaluation of information in leads. The presented information should be in a format where actions can be taken based on it without needing to analyze it further, and anyone viewing it should be able to quickly get an overview of how well targets are being reached (Jackson 2009). Combining data variables from one or more sources enables the creation of information. By identifying information requirements, KPIs can be defined and reporting based on them to give information about the success of strategic initiatives. Automating analysis and lead qualification based on it enables a more self-managing system that still supports human actions. Competence and business in general can be developed based on the information given directly by reports.

To answer the main research question “How can the lead management process be best supported at Metso?”, information gathered related to sub-questions is combined. The key conclusion that can be drawn from this research is that the communicative and workflow nature of the CRM system should be utilized in validating lead quality. The system should support and promote gathering information through collaboration both internally and with the prospect. This way, sales can best be supported in the work they do with lead management. Systems and processes should also support the creation of quality data and information that is tied to the lead, so that is in a format that can be used effectively. Key findings from chapter 6 support these conclusions. The proposed guidelines and practical examples of how they could be implemented can be found in Figure 36.

Figure 36. *Guidelines for lead qualification management.*

While the information system plays an important role in supporting lead management, processes and unified ways of working enable the system to be used most effectively. As a practical example, the Salesforce system offers a feed for each record, enabling commenting as well as seeing related activities. When entering action data about the lead, a special form could be built with some basic data variables, such as the time of the meeting and participant names. At the same time, the salesperson could evaluate the presumed success of the meeting and the potential of the lead. When the information is updated to the lead record, the development of the lead's potential can be followed.

In addition to the salesperson's evaluation, the lead's score could increase as a result of a certain level of activity and based on the data on the lead, as well as what data has been possible to add to the lead record since it was first entered. While the lead contact usually would not enter information about their budget on a web inquiry form, the information may be valuable to know on the lead for further qualification and can be solved through interaction with the prospect. Criteria already in use for opportunity qualification could also be used already at the lead stage. If the criteria has been validated early on, the information could transfer over to the opportunity as well when the lead has been converted. For example, sales needs to verify on proactive opportunities that the customer's industry is a strategically important industry for Metso. Once validated that the data has been filled out correctly on the lead form, this criteria can usually be considered as valid, since options provided are only those that are core customer industries for Metso.

In the overall picture, the general potential and quality of leads being managed within Metso could be followed through reports and dashboards. Presumed success rates of meetings as seen by sales could also be compared to the potential of the lead as well as, later on, conversion rates of leads to opportunities and sales. The quality of data can also be tracked by following the amounts and kinds of changes that are made to data that has been entered on the lead form. Quality data can better provide information about what actions should be taken than data that is poor in quality.

7.2 Evaluation of the research and results

Existing literature indicated that lead management has been previously researched mainly as a part of sales management, with focus more on lead generation than how leads are handled once they have been entered. Customer relationship management is also a widely researched topic, which, however, concentrates then on the phases that happen often after a customer has been acquired. As a result, somewhat of a gap was identified, in the same way that a gap existed in visibility between leads and opportunities at Metso (e.g. Erschik 1989; Monat 2011). A reason for this gap could be that lead handling differs so much per company based on the processes and information systems that are in use, that defining a collective framework may not be practical. Another reason could be that sales often learns lead handling through experience, and in fact even literature has often failed to document

the processes related to it due to the tacit nature of the knowledge tied to it. They "just know" how to manage leads.

While this thesis gives some indication of lead handling at a general level, the results and conclusions are tailored for the customer organization, and may not be adaptable to every industry and company. Companies in a similar strategic phase may find the results most useful in their own exploration of how lead management can best be supported. This could include companies that are also moving towards a more proactive and customer-centric sales organization, as well as companies where there are major changes ongoing with their information systems architecture. Understanding the information and visibility requirements generally related to lead management can help find a solution that caters to the needs of marketing, sales, product lines as well as top level management.

Many of the findings from empirical observation and interviews could be tied to findings from literature, indicating that this research is supported by prior findings. Activities and information from both ends of the lead handling process overlap with lead generation as well as opportunity and account management. Many of the information needs are also the same or similar, as full process visibility is a typical requirement at any level. This research can also help fill the mentioned gap in documented knowledge between lead generation and customer relationship management.

When evaluating the success of the research, it is typical to evaluate how reliable the results are. This means the empirical findings are possible to repeat in the same kinds of circumstances. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 226) As mentioned previously, circumstances are highly likely to change and repeating this research even in the same company may not lead to the exact same results, since the research is qualitative. However, the key findings should be similar to those presented in this research, and the possible reasons for differing results should be possible to identify. For example, organizational changes may generate new kinds of ideas and requirements for lead management. Descriptions of research and analysis methods in chapter 4 aim to improve the reliability of this research by describing them in a way that enables repeating the research. Appendix A also provides the interview outline that was used. An indication of reliability is that many of the findings could be tied to prior research, and therefore have already been discovered in other context.

When evaluating the validity of research, it should be considered whether the research methods were able to achieve accurate and complete results for its purpose. Errors in validity can be caused, for example, by subjectivity or ambiguous interview questions, which may be difficult for participants to interpret in the way intended. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, pp. 226-227) While the methods used in this thesis were selected based on their suitability for the research and accessibility for the researcher, it is good to note that there are also other methods that may have been better suitable. The familiarity of the other methods to the researcher was not, however, very high, leading to "easier" methods being chosen that were guaranteed to also give results.

While the researcher aimed to be as objective as possible when doing both theoretical and empirical research, it is possible that their own views and experiences had some effect on different phases of the qualitative research. For example, it was realized quite late in the interviews that not all participants understood a sales lead in the same way. When interview requests were initially sent out, some questions arose, leading to some confusion and changes in interview participants. The definition of a sales lead as seen in this thesis was eventually incorporated into interview discussions, but should probably have been defined already when requesting interviews.

A good indication that objectivity was reached for the most part is that final results were different than the researcher had expected at first. While expecting to find certain data that gave indication of a good lead, instead it was found that behavior and interaction played a far more significant role in lead qualification than any single piece of information. Data can support the quality and success of those interactions when it is at a satisfactory level.

Another topic to evaluate when discussing the success of the thesis is the ability of the research to reach the objectives set for it as well as answer the research questions. In this thesis, the answers to research questions were discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7.1 along with how these conclusions were reached. By answering the research questions, it was possible also to conclude that the main objective of the thesis was reached. Guidelines for future development of the CRM system's lead qualification functionalities to support sales' work have been successfully proposed based on findings.

7.3 Further research topics

Some references of further research topics related to lead qualification management were already mentioned throughout the thesis, as they tied in closely with some of the topics that were covered. These included topics related especially to lead generation as well as customer relationship management. There is also more existing research available on these topics that could easily be used to extend this research if the scope were broader. Especially tying in a more detailed framework for account management would affect how sales leads are seen in relation to those accounts. This was brought up in interviews as well as literature.

The scope of this thesis was restricted to concentrate on sales' part of the lead qualification process, between the phases of lead generation and opportunity management. Extending the scope to take into account the full range of activities and processes related to, for example, the REAN framework, would give a better understanding of all activities related to sales leads. This would also better correspond with the information requirement that currently exists at Metso to have full visibility of sales process from end to end. Applying REAN and other frameworks also enable more detailed research of reporting and

scoring that could also be tied to sales leads, such as was already briefly explored in chapters 2 and 3.

The empirical research for this thesis was conducted with a set of only five interviews and observation of about 40 inquiries. A larger and more heterogeneous sample especially in interviews could have given more practical results that could directly be translated into information system requirements for lead qualification management. Gathering more information from sales and marketing representatives instead of mainly only sales management could have given the thesis a slightly different perspective as well as altered the results to some level.

While the research scope could be extended, it could also be limited to a more detailed topic. One example would be the effect that the growing usage of mobile devices could have on lead management. Devices make information and access available almost anywhere, changing the typical working hours per country into giving more room for global communication and collaboration, both within a company and towards its prospects. Another way to limit the topic would be to focus separately on each phase of REAN and how it could be applied most effectively.

The question if analytics in lead management was brought up in this thesis, but it was not focused on as a central topic. Since analytics covers a wide range of techniques and methods, the whole of analytics in lead qualification and management could be explored as a topic on its own. Much earlier research on the topic was not found, indicating it could be an area that is open for new ideas. Prior research about analytics could be combined with knowledge about information in leads to find what all it could bring up.

A topic that often poses challenges is the management of organizational change. Also in this case, with the implementation of a new system and new ways of working, change management plays an important role and therefore could be a very relevant next topic to investigate. While this thesis provides guidelines for development, it does not directly recommend a roadmap for the implementation of changes or practical actions and roles related to it. These would be essential to identify when beginning to implement the changes into the organization.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW OUTLINE

Part 1: Working with lead/inquiry management

- What is your role in the organization and especially related to managing sales leads and inquiries?
- What other roles are involved in the lead management process? Why? What kinds of competences and (tacit) knowledge do they need to have?
- Who is initially responsible for qualifying and assigning leads, and based on what criteria?
- How successful is the handover of leads from marketing to sales?
- How do you experience the role of the information system as part of lead management? How could it better support your work?
- What kind of process do you follow when working with sales leads? Why?
- What are the main challenges in the lead management process? Why? How could they be developed?
- Can you share any examples of sales cases where it started from a lead? Were these cases typical, successful or unsuccessful? Why?

Part 2: Information in leads

- What makes a good sales inquiry / lead? Why?
- What information does a good sales inquiry include? What is specifically important to know in your business area?
- Which of these pieces of information do you find valuable? Why?
    - (basic contact information, location)
    - contact title/position in the company (authority, ability to make purchasing decision)
    - are they the end customer or is someone else an end customer
    - industry and product
    - segmentation information (based on segmentation defined by Metso)
    - information about the company's business environment/segment
    - reason for inquiry (basic need-solution survey, scanning provider, short listing provider, request for quotation/proposal)
    - timing – are they in a position where they are looking to make a purchase
    - budget/resources – can they make a purchase financially
    - need – how much do they need it, why, when
    - previous inquiry & purchase history
    - the prospect's existing products, other suppliers
    - the prospect's perceptions / brand awareness of Metso
    - the contact's/prospect's website activity and interest shown (to certain pages)
    - the prospect's responsiveness and willingness to collaborate
    - the source of the lead, how was it initiated

- How do you know an inquiry will most likely lead to a sale (based on information in the inquiry)?
- When do you disqualify (decide on no action) for a sales inquiry / lead?
- How would you describe an “ideal” lead or customer? Why? How do you determine their potential?

Part 3: Analytics

- What do you want to know about sales leads and why?
- What is specifically important in your role and what information could be important for people in other roles to know? Why?
- What are the targets for lead management? What is their current significance and what should it be in the future?
- How do you know lead management has been successful, and what is that information needed for?